

KZN Legislature enforces resolutions to advance change for the disabled

Report and pictures by Vusi Shabalala

The KwaZulu-Natal Government places the dignity and welfare of its citizenry to the core of a heart on effective governance. This was an explosion which was voiced by various speakers during the 2015 People with Disabilities' Parliament which took place at Ezakheni TVET, Mnambithi Municipality of the UThukela District on the 3rd and 4th of December 2015.

The 2015 Disabilities' Parliament is not a once-off session but rather a continuous parliamentary sitting of people with disabilities with the fullest participation of disabled persons where all matters that surround their personalities is addressed and solutions and interventions are deliberated on for social change. One may refer back to the resolutions of the 2014 Disabilities' Parliament which was held at Ugu Sports and Leisure Centre in Hibiscus, South Coast of KwaZulu-Natal. The two day session commenced with Cluster Commissions on the 3rd of November 2015 with commissions not having convened due to reasons not detailed in this piece.



Above is the Leader of Government Business for the Province of KwaZulu-Natal and also MEC for Community Safety and Liaison, Honourable Mr Thembinkosi Willis Mchunu MPL as he delivered the keynote address

Time was not wasted as the programme began to roll out and the opening prayer was conducted by Reverend Ngwenya who hails from the uThukela

District Interfaith Forum. Subsequently, a welcoming address was given by the Speaker of the KwaZulu-Natal Legislature, Honourable Mrs Lydia Johnson MPL. In her address, Mrs Johnson stressed that “there is now way that government will avoid issues that affect its citizenry but the spade work is to respond head-on in dealing with problems that affect the masses”.

Mr M Zulu, the member of the eThekweni Disability Forum delivered three reports for the Office of the Premier; Office of the Speaker of the KZN Legislature and the office of the MEC for Social Development, Mrs Weziwe Gcotyelwa Thusi. Detailed in the reports were genuine issues that require attention and intervention from the provincial government. However, as he delivered the reports Mr Zulu reiterated that the re-integration of people with disabilities in the working world has gained much significances, especially as a result of the political and government will to lighten the burden on social insurances. He also alluded that for people with disabilities taking part in the working life is an essential condition to an equal participation to society. This is true that work for them is proof of their full value and capabilities. The reports were handed over to the Programme Director.

The Premier’s key note address was delivered by the Leader of Government Business for the Province of KwaZulu-Natal and also MEC for Community Safety and Liaison, Honourable Mr Thembinkosi Willis Mchunu MPL, who attended the event on behalf of the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Honourable Senzo Edward Mchunu. In his delivery, Mr Mchunu touched on the following points:

- ✚ that the Provincial Administration shall through the Provincial Legislature and by virtue of its status and powers make sure that all people with disabilities are afforded the respect and dignity they deserve as the whole world continuously gets committed to the celebration of the International Day for People with Disabilities;
- ✚ various external factors that lead citizens to fall victims of disability must be avoided and prevented in some forms by the provincial government and all other spheres of society. It is not in the interest of government to leave out people with disabilities in the cold;
- ✚ the livelihood and well-being of people with disabilities must be challenged with all available means and resources so as to boast the nation with long living lifespan. He further added that equal opportunities in working world are one of the key aspects of the provincial disability resolutions. This means that employing people with disabilities benefits to employees and to employers alike. People with disabilities also possess faculties which can give added value to any enterprise;

- ✚ that all resolutions taken during the past sessions must be implemented with the necessary urgency – the Provincial Government’s acknowledgement and commitment to concerns in respect of the ‘Resolutions’ taken during the 2014 Disability Parliament held at Ugu Sports and Leisure Center, that the Office of the Premier has developed a Draft Strategy Plan on the Development of People with Disabilities for the years 2016 to 2019. He further responded and attested that the provincial government has made strides in the appointment of people with disabilities in workplaces;
- ✚ that the Provincial Department of Human Settlements has taken the matter up to ensuring that people with disabilities are afforded the first choice in the provisioning with suitable housing and proper accommodation.

In his closing remarks, Mr Mchunu acknowledged that all concerns raised may not have been addressed and concluded in time and at once but emphasised that the provincial government will ensure to live by its commitment in ensuring that the lives of the people of KwaZulu-Natal is changed for the better.

Immediately after the key note address by Mr Mchunu, the Parliamentary sitting and debate resumed at approximately 12:27. The order of the paper number 10/2015 was presented and scheduled as follows:

- ✚ silent prayer or meditation or reading of the prayer in Schedule 2, obituaries and other ceremonial matters,
- ✚ announcements by the Speaker, Formal motions and notices by the Chief Whip, notices and motions, orders of the day and
- ✚ finally the debate on the theme.



Above is the set-up of the 2015 Disability Parliament at Ezakheni TVET, Mnambithi Municipality of the UThukela District

In the adjournment of the debate seating and parliament closure the adoption of resolutions was undertaken which was followed by the vote of thanks conducted by the Deputy Mayor for Ladysmith/Emnambithi Municipality, Councillor SR Mfusi.

We have noted with anticipation that there is a general acceptance in government circles and the wider community that there is a significant problem of unmet need with respect to the provision of support and assistance for people with disabilities. However, it should equally be acknowledged that the KwaZulu-Natal government has indeed played its role to supporting and providing assistance to most people with a disability. Government has provided and still continue to provide a range of services both directly and indirectly to help those with disabilities. We should also complement all stakeholders, private partners and community sectors who proffer their support and resources in this regard. It must also be emphasised that because there is a mix of mainstream and disability-specific programs and services, it is difficult to get an accurate picture of the extent of funding and support to the disability population in the province.

Finally, one should see a living document that will talk to the Disability Legislation, Rights and Advocacy where the legislation will cover the rights of people with disability and a body that will be charged with protecting the rights of disabled people and continuously advocate on their behalf. Yes, together we can move South Africa forward.