

# MEC Ravi Pillay pays homage to the children for Mandela Day at Mariathal Mission Combined School

*Report and images by Vusi Shabalala*

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“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children”. This is one but amongst the many quotations of the late former President of South Africa, Mr Nelson Rolihlala Mandela that brings us to the gist of this piece. As South Africa and the world cuddle together in celebration of his humility and legacy, the desire to follow suit did not leave MEC Ravigasen Ranganathan Pillay MPL unnoticed.

It was Thursday the 16<sup>th</sup> of July 2015 as MEC Pillay and his entourage paid a special visit to Mariathal Mission Combined School, situated in Ixopo, part of the Harry Gwala District Municipality, with an aim of paying homage for the children of the school. It should be noted that schools were closed for the winter season but through community mobilisation, all parents and pupils alike came in their numbers on the day of Ravis’s visit. The visit stems from touching moments of Mr Pillay’s previous visit where he personally observed and realised the real need of giving hope to the children of Mariathal. Accompanying Mr Pillay was Mr Dlamini, the Hounorable Deputy Mayor for Buhlebezwe and his team (within the local political structures) with Mr Sikhumbuzo Gumede, the Head of Ministry managing all day’s programme and protocols. The school’s Principal, Mr Mayeza delivered a profound word of welcome and assured the visitors the schools commitment to hospitality and excellence.

In his quest to honour the late Mr Mandela, he donated goods to the school kids. The goods were in a form of brand new uniform such as female dresses (tunics) and male trousers; male and female school shoes; jerseys and other stationeries. In his keynote address, Mr Pillay said “



**Above: MEC Ravi Pillay as he addressed the Mariathal Mission Combined School learners**

Mr Pillay's keynote address and the handing over of donations to individual pupils unveiled his reverence without measure, his intense humility and most unreserved adoration which left the Mariathal Mission Combined School management, members of the Student Governing Body, parents and pupils with huge exuberant hilarity. The programme got shortened due to other commitments that were scheduled to cover "MEC Ravi Pillay's 67 minutes of humility".

The second phase was the site clearing of the "One-Stop" area, a very busy and densely populated shopping and business complex in uMzimkhulu. It was again MEC Pillay who led the team. All team members were clad in their respective protective site clearing gear. That activity brought a clear message to the local residents as they witnessed the involvement of MEC Ravi Pillay and his team revitalising the environment. This was meant for all people to understand the life cycle of our products from production to disposal, as well as how to reuse the waste we have already created.



**Above: A handshake of hope as a student received school uniform from MEC Pillay**

Considering humans are the only animals to produce trash that does not biodegrade, proper waste management will be a key issue facing current and future generations.

The final part of the day's programme was completed with a visit to Kostad where MEC Pillay had an engagement with the community in order to redress and take stock on all previous issues that were raised by the community. This visit and engagement formed part of a confirmation on the part of government that 'a promise made must always be kept to fulfilment'. Notwithstanding the problems encountered by the provincial cabinet or communities themselves, remaining true and positive to the people will always remain the course of 'good governance'.

It can be safely stated that in today's political world, effective community engagement is a vehicle that can be used to build more resilient relationships with communities. This can positively lead to the identification of mechanisms for building a community's strength and its ability to join with government and other stakeholders in dealing with difficult matters and change.

It therefore means that inputs from the communities can virtually improve the quality of all developed policies so as they should be more practical and relevant; Such inputs will ensure that basic services are delivered in a more effective and efficient manner for all communities; the provincial cabinet will have an opportunity to check the status of its citizenry in an 'open' and 'eye-to-eye' scenario; This remains a positive platform where the community and government work closely 'hand-in-hand' in dealing with all social issues of concerns with both reaching an amicable goal through positive and mutual agreement; This also assists the provincial government to assess and make a reality check on its reputation; Crucially vital is asking the community how the cabinet is meeting local needs could be a positive or at least informative engagement exercise.

It is also evident that early notice of emerging issues puts government in a better position to deal with those issues in a proactive way, instead of reacting as anger and

conflict arise. Therefore, positive engagement enhances the reputation of the government as open, accountable and willing to listen to the people. On the other side of the coin, the communities and other participating stakeholders also benefit with purposeful and well-planned engagement, there will be opportunities for a diversity of voices to be heard on issues which matter to people; Communities can expect government to meet certain standards of engagement and give feedback on government's ability to meet those standards; Communities will be able to identify their priorities for themselves; There may be more ownership of solutions to current problems or building plans for the future so that the community shares in decision-making and has a higher level of responsibility for creating that future; Such community engagement will foster a sense of belonging to community and considerable benefits from working together on behalf of the community and ultimately individual citizens may become empowered and proactive with regard to issues that affect them.



**A group photo shoot with the leadership also filled the pupils with joy**

These ideas and commitments by politicians and government will continue seeking to advance sustainability across communities and educational institutions around the world by educating, engaging, and empowering multi-generational groups of citizens through awareness initiatives and action projects. We help to identify how global issues related to energy, water, food, waste and ecology are affecting communities and then develop local solutions to address these challenges through a grassroots movement. It is therefore fathomable that ecology is the idea that we are a by-product of our environment and that the effects of our social, economic, and environmental impacts are caused by our consumptive culture. Ecology allows for the inclusion of a variety of global issues such as human rights, gender and income inequality, or human health to name a few, and recognizes their interdependency with the environmental movement.