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## **Remarks by the Minister of Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, MP on the occasion of the official launch of the Child Protection Month Campaign**

Sunday, 19 May, 2024 | Mittah Seperepere Convention Centre, Kimberley-Northern Cape

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Programme Directors—Mr Ichabod Manyane and Northern Cape Child Ambassador, Chareez James;  
Northern Cape MEC of Social Development, Ms Nontobeko Vilakazi;  
Speaker of Frances Baard, Cllr Nonyameko Shushu;  
President of Nelson Mandela Children’s Parliament and Child Ambassador Limpopo Province, Dikgang Morudu;  
Acting Director-General for Social Development, Mr Peter Netshipale;  
Acting Deputy Director-General: Welfare Services, Ms Siza Magangoe;  
Head of Provincial Department of Social Development, Ms Shouneez Wookey;  
Heads of Departments and all senior officials from all government departments and agencies here present;  
Parents and caregivers;  
Boys and girls of Northern Cape

Dumelang, Molweni, Good morning, Goeie more!

1. Thank you all for joining us this morning for the launch of this year’s Child Protection Month here at Mittah Seperepere Convention Centre, which is named after a stalwart

of our liberation struggle—Mittah Selekanyana Seperepere. I would also like to thank you, MEC Vilakazi and the Northern Cape Provincial Government for agreeing to host us here today.

2. On this very important occasion, which coincides with the 30 Years of Freedom and Democracy in South Africa, our thoughts turn to Mittah Seperepere and Frances Baard, both of whom made significant contribution to the freedom and democracy we now enjoy in South Africa. Our freedom came at the cost of their hard work, commitment, sacrifices and we must not forget this.
3. As we celebrate this historic occasion, we can should take immense pride in what we have collectively achieved as a nation. We have come a long way and achieved much as a nation in protecting and promoting the rights of our children, although we still have a number of serious challenges that confront us.
4. As Government, our vision is to make South Africa a place where all children and young people are loved, confident, happy and healthy, and are empowered to reach their full potential. We took the first step towards this vision in 1995 when the leadership of the founding father of our democracy, uTata Nelson Mandela, South Africa ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)—the first international instrument to be ratified by the new democratic government.
5. The CRC is also the first international instrument that gives specific recognition as to children as rights holders and introduced the principle of the best interest of the child. By ratifying the Convention in its first year of democracy, our Government recognised its primary responsibility for the respect, protection and fulfillment of children’s rights. Thirty years on, we take great pride that under successive ANC-led Government, we have:
  - Progressively expanded social grants to the most vulnerable children and significantly reduced child poverty;

- improved access to basic education, reaching universal enrolment rate;
  - expanded access to early childhood development (ECD) and providing subsidy for the most vulnerable children;
  - passed and implemented child-centred pieces of legislation, including the Children’s Act and the Child Justice Act, both of which entrenched children’s rights and child participation in matters affecting them;
  - strengthened families as the first line of response in the care and protection of children;
  - expanded the provision of primary health care to children and families
6. The impact of these measures has seen significant improvements in the well-being of South Africa’s children and we are proud that the DSD Portfolio has been at the forefront of this. As we look to the next 30 years, we will continue to strive to make South Africa a better country for each individual child to reach their potential.
7. I am encouraged by the progress we have achieved and the increased advocacy and public awareness created by the Child Protection Month campaign, but there is still a lot of work ahead of us. I call on all concerned South Africans and non-governmental organizations to continue to work hand in hand with us because child protection is a shared responsibility. Child protection is everyone’s responsibility.
8. The 365 Days Child Protection Programme of Action recognises the importance of families and communities working together with Government, community based organisations and development partners to prevent child abuse, neglect and exploitation. The family is the best first line of defence and support in the protection of children. That is the reason why over the years we have taken deliberate and decisive action to implement child-and family-oriented programmes.

9. One of the major concerns for me is the unacceptably high levels of violence against children in our country. We have all heard of the tragic story of the 6-year old Joslin Smith who went missing from Saldanha Bay on 19 February and to this day has not been found. Hers is a sad story of many children in our country whose rights are violated and robbed of their childhood.
  
10. We are also deeply concerned about the alarming number of teenage pregnancies across the country, including here in the Northern Cape, with John Taolo Gaetsewe and Frances Baard as leading districts. We must act now to stop this! While we encourage teenage mothers and fathers to remain in school and complete their studies, we must work together to stop teenage pregnancy in the first place.
  
11. Earlier this morning, I had an opportunity to interact with families who are beneficiaries of our programs. The one thing parents said they really want is for their children to take education seriously and that their children remain in school to improve their chance to build a brighter future for themselves and their country.
  
12. One of the issues that I am deeply concerned about is the sexual exploitation and abuse of children online. Children today spend most of their time online. The Disrupting Harm Study shows that while the number of young children accessing the internet and new technology has grown significantly over recent years, awareness of the potential risks remains low and cases of online sexual abuse and exploitation have reportedly increased significantly. Addressing these real threats require a holistic approach and commitment from all stakeholders, including parents, teachers, community-based organisations and children themselves.
  
13. The most effective tool in addressing online child sexual abuse and exploitation is prevention. Prevention requires awareness raising, education and sensitisation of all stakeholders especially children and their families within and outside the school setting. We need to empower children and youth through training on the safe use of new technologies and social media, and the creation of child-friendly helplines to report online abuse and exploitation.

14. As I conclude, I want to salute all our partner organisations who work tirelessly in communities across our country to strengthen the child protection system and ensuring that our children are safe, happy and healthy. Without you and your passion, many children would be exposed to harm that no child deserves to experience.

15. As we celebrate 30 years of freedom, it is equally important that we celebrate our volunteers, parents, caregivers, community leaders and community-based organisations for all your contribution in protecting children and supporting families.

I thank you.