

NELSON MANDELA CHILDREN'S PARLIAMENT

THURSDAY, 9 OCTOBER 2025

GOOD HOPE CHAMBER

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PROCEEDINGS OF THE CHILDREN'S PARLIAMENT 2025

Members of the Children's Parliament met in the Good Hope Chamber at 09:32.

The Session Chairperson, as Chairperson, took the Chair and requested members to observe a moment of silence for prayers or meditation

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Hon members, before hon Frolick starts, I would like to give the House Rules to our members. All our phones must be on silent, please. If you want to speak, you must then go outside, please, so that we don't disturb the proceedings. You may talk to one another, but not very loud. Thank you.

IsiXhosa:

Ingaba siyavana?

English:

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Thank you.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Chairperson, good morning to everyone. On behalf of the Speaker of the National Assembly, hon Thoko Didiza, I would like to welcome everyone to this very auspicious occasion. It is indeed a beautiful sight to see all these excited young faces in front of us, and I think they deserve a round of applause. They are also our special guests here today.

I also want to recognise the hon Minister of Social Development, hon Tolashe; the MEC for Social Development in the Eastern Cape, hon Fanta, the Chairperson of the Committee on Social Development, hon Masango; the Chairperson of the Committee on Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, who is here with us; as well as the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Children and People with Disabilities. I want to recognise the Deputy Country Representative of UNICEF, who is here. Thank you very much.

Departmental officials, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of Parliament, I can indeed say, hon members, that we are privileged to host our children and our partners, both local and international, to discuss and interact on how best those

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in authority can amplify the voices of children in planning and budgeting, which is the theme of today's proceedings. To begin, I firstly wish to recall the inaugural sitting of the first democratic Parliament on 9 May 1994, when Members of Parliament endorsed Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela as the President of a free and democratic South Africa.

That day marked the moment when the authority of the state was transferred to ordinary people, who had struggled for so long for our freedom. It was also a moment where we could, as South Africans, reflect on our history, but also look to a new future founded on the constitutional principles of dignity, equality and opportunity.

However, President Mandela knew that this vision could not be reached at once, or that, once realised, remain forever so. He knew that the attainment and preservation of a just and prosperous society would always depend on harnessing the enthusiasm, the creativity and the talents of our young children and our youth.

It was in the National Assembly that President Mandela read a poem by Ingrid Jonker called, and I quote: "A child is not dead." This poem was about how a child could inspire a nation.

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South Africa has certainly made significant progress since 1994. Almost all of our children are now in places of learning, some with free tuition, some of our schools provide meals every day, have access to primary health care that has improved for parents and children. Resources have also been allocated to improve the safety, fostering awareness of children's rights and social services.

All these efforts culminated in the adoption of a national plan of action for children in 2019, a blueprint for government and other actors to work together. Nevertheless, we are acutely aware that progress has been uneven.

Many children continue to experience unacceptable hardships, struggling with poverty at home or attending schools that are far away and lack the necessary resources and facilities.

There are still cases of children who are subject to bullying and violence. Too many children miss school because of health reasons.

There is also an argument that government interventions to address children's needs remain fragmented between departments, across provinces and in some cases, in oversight. In this context, Parliament and its partners have recognised

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the imperative of better planning, policy development and budgeting to ensure that scarce resources are optimally invested and leveraged. Essential to this exercise will be expanding the involvement of children in these activities.

The Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament that we are hosting today was conceived for this purpose, to involve children in the decisions about their lives and their future. Indeed, I do believe that discussions today and the views of all those who have joined us will be invaluable in plotting future efforts. Let us pledge to continue the work that President Mandela began.

I look forward to our discussions today, and I thank you for your attendance and your participation in this very important Children's Parliament. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): We will now proceed to the debate. I will recognize the outgoing 2023 Child Ambassadors for their report back. Each speaker will be given three minutes. This will be followed by report backs from each thematic area and each speaker will be given one minute and 30 seconds.

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Mr P KHOASE (Free State): Good morning, hon members. My name is Kearabetswe Peter Khoase, the outgoing Deputy President of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament and the outgoing Ambassador of the Free State province.

It's a good morning and with this day, under the provincial report that I'm going to give back, as I say again, we tried. Children of South Africa, I'm proud to say that under the Free State province, we are proud, and we will continue to work of magnetic significance.

Free State consists of five districts. It consists of Lejeleputswa District, Tabonfutsaniana, Mangao Metro, Kharib District and the Fesli Dhaba District. We had elections. Under the children's elections, they had elected me to become their Child Ambassador. We have my speaker, who's currently the Deputy Speaker of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, Unathi. So, in this regard, we had a much consultation whereby we had to find ways in order to address the challenges that we were facing. We gave members or the children an opportunity to outline the challenges that they were facing in their communities. This went for every district. After the children had submitted their plans, then we decided to take the

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initiative to call upon counteractive measures in order to defeat the challenges that they were facing.

We are glad to say that we have managed to decrease during our period insignificant schools. We managed to see a drop rate of teenage pregnancy, dropping down in a manner that we couldn't believe.

Currently, as we are still working, we are magnifying our organization to find out what is the way forward in order to keep the rate sustainable.

At the end of the day, we no longer want to see teenage pregnancy. Substance abuse, we've been working with the SA Police Service, and they've ensured that they go to schools, they speak to children about why is it important to not use substance abuse at all. I'm proud to say that even under the National Parliament, the hon members have managed to represent and support me in a magnificent manner. With this being said, hon members, I say that I'm proud of the Free State province, and I'm proud for the work that us as children, we did. Thank you very much.

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Thank you very much, hon member. You have led by example in terms of keeping time.

Mr T NKOSI (Mpumalanga): Hon members, greetings yet again. The legends of presidency mentioned something important last evening. He said, if we were to write everything we did with the portfolio, we would write an entire article. Therefore, with that being said, I would like to highlight a few of the most important events that we had with the portfolio.

Firstly, I would like to highlight on the fact that my team and I, and in that giving recognition to my Provincial Representative Council of Learners, RCL, Mr. Moganiki, were able to alleviate some of the challenges that the children of Mpumalanga faced. To cite an example, we had an issue of language barrier. In order to bridge the gap between those privileged and unprivileged areas, there was an event that I talked about last evening. It was about pushback-rich learners who were provided with the basic things that they needed. We also advocated what is advocacy leadership. If I may ask the House, what is advocacy? It's about necessarily fighting for what belongs to you. It's about making sure that you get what you deserve. Thus, I can assure you that my team and I paved the way for you guys. I want you to excel, go out there, do

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much better than us. With that being said, I would like to descend the podium. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Thank you, hon members. I was still trying to check the time, and I found out that well one minute spent. I don't know if I am generous, I will give it to somebody, and I don't want to be seen as being biased to that person. Unfortunately, I will then take my own time and decides which one.

Ms K ADAMS (Eastern Cape): Good morning, hon members at large. Good morning to the Minister. Good morning to the Department of Social Development stakeholders, fellow parliamentarians, the outgoing legends and the incoming delegates of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament.

We as the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament always say nothing for us without us. Therefore, child participation has been the forefront of our mission. For us, we have had the problem in the Eastern Cape of forming connections with the huge number of districts. What we have formed was the National Children's Forum in each municipality. This was started in my district, the Nelson Mandela Bay, in which we were able to get

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representatives from each school to come together and talk about the pressing matters of that district.

It is impressive to see and to be reminded of the intelligence of our fellow children. There we were able to form events, such as the one talking about child rights, in which we were able to invite numerous schools to inform them about what their rights are and how they were able to practically implement them. Time and time again come the problem of substance abuse. We cannot forget the event, the tragedy of Enyobeni. Sadly, this also happened in East London, my province. Substance abuse has something that we have been trying to minimise. For us, we support the Amendment Bill to the National Alcohol Act, in which we are saying that the amount of alcohol ads being shown on our TV screens must be minimised, especially at times in which children are watching TV.

How can it be that within a span of an hour, we are able to see two adverts. We are saying that adverts must be screened after 10 o'clock at night and between 6 o'clock in the morning, as we recognise these are times in which most children are sleeping. We were also going around to schools advocating and showing the depressive number of effects that

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alcohol has. We have had numerous engagements with schools, inspiring them, because in the Eastern Cape we have the highest amount of unemployment rates.

We were able to recognise that there is a need for inspiring the youth and the children, to be able to up their morale and let them believe in themselves.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Unfortunately, member, your time has expired.

Ms K ADAMS (Eastern Cape): Thank you very much.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): I have just said I will use my discretion. I am dividing the minutes. I just want to check with the Table. Is interpretation on? I'm raising that because I want to encourage you, if you want to speak on the language of your choice that you will be comfortable with, do that without any fear, because you are not only talking with us here, you are talking with the young ones in the rural areas and in the farms that may be listening to you.

Mr U LUCAS (North West): I greet you all this beautiful morning, the government officials and my hon members. As I

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reflect on the impact that I have been able to make as a North West child ambassador, all I can do is really give thanks to the Lord, for he has made so many amazing advancements in my province.

The North West struggles with a lot of things such as gender-based violence and femicide, substance abuse, and one thing that I have loved pushing is the fact that spreading awareness is really what we can do, because children are the ones that make the change, and by spreading awareness and by pushing education. From 2023 to 2024, our matric pass rate has increased from 81% to 87%, making us fourth nationally speaking. I must say, this year is not just a plain statistic, but rather it is proof that children are waking up and understanding the power in their hands by acknowledging education, and by us spreading awareness in these areas, whether pervert or not. We are encouraging our children, and as the ambassador, I have been able to learn from every single one of them. I have been able to humble myself, and I have been able to understand the amount of doors that I, as the ambassador, have been able to open, and as I speak to the upcoming ones here, I encourage you, do not think that this is something which is going to be water off a duck's back, but rather acknowledge this is one of the best opportunities you

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could have, for the government has seen you, and they want to hear you now. I thank you.

Ms K MEJE (Gauteng): Chairperson, I'd love to greet the esteemed hon guest, esteemed leaders, fellow children. My name is Khomotso Meje, K-H-O-M-O-T-S-O, yes. I'd love to greet you with the words that say, "It takes a village to raise a child", most especially because we wouldn't be here if it wasn't the combined efforts of the government departments. So, we thank you for that.

It is with great gratitude and immense pride that I stand before you today. This moment is emotional and inspiring for me. Emotional because it marks the end of a powerful chapter in my journey, and inspiring because it is a reminder why children should be included in platforms such as these where we can speak for ourselves.

When I began my journey as an ambassador, I committed myself to ensuring that more children were reached, heard, and empowered. I worked with networks to recruit more children and help them understand the matters affecting them and their lives, because change begins when children are informed and included. All children, especially those with disabilities.

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Through this work, I became part of the National Trailblazers under the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, where it is a space where young change makers come together to be capacitated on how to shape the future we want to see.

One of the highlights of my journey was the opportunity to represent South African children at the 29th Conference of the Parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change, COP29, supported by the Save the Children South Africa.

Standing on that international platform to speak on children was not just an honour, it was a responsibility to carry the voices of many back home. Thank you to our government for allowing me that opportunity.

I also work closely with the Ekurhuleni School for the Deaf to make sure that no child is left behind. My passion for climate change has gone throughout my time as an ambassador through Save the Children Climate Programs, I attended so many of them and most recently I was part of the Johannesburg Climate Week where we planted a forest and encouraged young people to bring children into climate matters.

Nationally, we also contributed, I was also privileged to be part of the team that drafted the Children's Sustainable

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Development Goals, SDG, complimentary report, which one of my peers represented at the United States High Level Political Forum in New York, recently.

As I close this chapter, I want to leave a message. We need more platforms and opportunities for children to participate meaningfully because children's issues are not soft issues. Thank you.

Ms C JAMES (Northern Cape): Good morning, ladies and gentlemen, government officials, and hon members. Since I have been elected as a Northern Cape Ambassador, we took issues such as gender-based violence and bullying into consideration. And taking that into consideration, we had cyberbullying and ... [Inaudible.] ... awareness campaigns and gender-based violence talks at school. But during my term as an ambassador, I have learned and achieved a lot. But I still believe that we can do more.

As we are going to give over to the newly elected ambassadors, I believe that they know, and they are willing to guide you guys through and to have your back. And they don't want you guys to not know what you're doing.

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I really appreciate this opportunity that that was afforded to all legends. I think they all agree that they can say that they appreciate this opportunity. And then I would like to thank all the government officials. I thank you.

The SESSION CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Thank you very much, on a lighter note hon House Chair, they will be good representatives because when they deliver their speeches, they are able to deliver them one, using phones, which personally I'm afraid to do it because I don't want to miss my time. But they are able to do that within two or one and a half hours. That's very good. Well done.

Ms I DAWOOD (Western Cape): Good morning, Minister, respective government officials, stakeholders and most importantly the children in the room. My name is Isabella Dawood and I'm the outgoing Child Ambassador for the Western Cape.

As our outgoing speaker has said the main goal of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament's main priority was child participation. However, in the Western Cape, we extended that to meaningful child participation, where children's voices are authentically heard in governance.

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Over the past year, my work with the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament and the Department of Social Development has allowed me to actively advance child rights and participation in all levels of governance. I contributed to the National Plan of Action for children in the country. Additionally, me and my team in the Western Cape sat down with the President's speech writer head of the 2023 state of the nation address.

Additionally, with this, we held many workshops regarding gender-based violence, substance abuse, as well as all issues affecting children in the Western Cape. Additionally, we have also worked with the Children's Institute to give meaningful advice and guidance to the child's gauge so that we could ensure that children's voices were authentically represented in this document.

Looking ahead for the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, we envision a world resource and nationally recognised platform where children's voices authentically heard. And not only are they consulted, however, they play an active role in decisions that affect them. Thank you.

Mr D MORUDU (Limpopo): Chairperson, I am the outgoing President of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, proudly

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from Limpopo Province. I'm going to talk about implementations, because if I mention events, yooo, I will take the whole day. Some people are even said, we are tired of seeing this face all the time, because I think I attended 80% of the events.

Let me balance you really quickly. I was the one to welcome the officialization of the sign language here at the 11th language in South Africa. I also managed to establish a junior council in our province. And not that only, I was able to formulate what we call the Individual Development Plan, IDP. We started with the first municipality, which is the Molemole Local Municipality, that was able to make a IDP specifically for children.

And then as for another thing, I managed to establish the volunteer program in our university for students to advocate for children's rights under the help of the United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF. We were also able to capacitate children on their rights. And through the hard work we have made, we have managed to bring about all different leaders from different sectors to come as one, so that we can create what we call coordination.

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We were also able to establish my own organization, which is Catalyst for Change, that is going to specifically work on children. This means my journey does not end here. I'll continue with the struggle.

Another thing we're able to participate in the Boy Joy Summit in response to gender-based violence through the help of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, we were able to make an initiative that is specifically for the boys so that they can be equipped in curbing the issue of gender-based violence.

I was also able to put all the officials from my province to work together. As I speak, ladies and gentlemen, the Department of Social Development is now working hand in hand with the Office of the Premier to ensure that the province services are provided.

With that being said, ladies and gentlemen, I am proud to continue fighting for the struggle of a black child. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Thank you very much, hon member. Because of the gap, there's one province that hasn't turned up. Hon Minister, let me just take this opportunity of

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showing you your guests. They are three. I'm going to call them, they must stand up because they wanted to come and witness what their elders do, because they are still children. Khanya Tshetswa, can you please stand up? Acengwa Gantsho and Olothando Fanta. They have come to see, observe, witness and learn, and in fact, they are excited because they are in Parliament, which is the most important thing.

Also, I'm told that they have already told their peers that they are here. You may be seated. Thank you very much. I will now recognise those that are giving a feedback from the thematic deliberations. If they are two, each of them is given one minute and 30 minutes. If it is only one from a particular topic, that person will take three minutes. The first is on climate change. From North West it is A Mokoena, and the second one is from Limpopo, hon L Mashishi. So it is one minute, 30 seconds each.

Group 1 – Climate Change

Ms A MOKOENA (North West): My Excellency, hon members and hon guests, my name is Angelina Larato Mokoena. Climate change is not an abstract threat, it is a living reality, erratic weather patterns and rapidly rising temperatures. To be clear,

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climate crisis also involves development crisis and justice crisis magnified by systematic inequality. We face challenges as building nets by schools. School infrastructures are not properly built, some are outdated and they lack required amendments to resist climatic impacts.

Closing down of schools due to lack of water has been highly reported, and it also affects the National School Nutrition Programme, NSNP, schemes, and Tshepo High School in Everton, Gauteng is one of the victims. Decisions are taken by beneficiaries in offices, not the rest outside the departments. According to section 199 in our Constitution, this is not obligated. Climate change affects learning system as children are unable to attend schools. Basically, section 29 in our Constitution is also violated. Thank you.

Ms L MASHISHI (Limpopo): Hon Session Chairperson, and greetings to the House at large. The one standing before you is Lefentse Mashishi, the child ambassador for the Limpopo Province. Concerning the resolutions which we have come with for the issue of climate change, we have come to a decision that the government should create platforms for children on which we will be able to voice out our concerns about climate change and influence policies for planning on climate change.

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We also thought that proper planning and budgeting for disaster management should be implemented. Our government has a tendency of replying very slowly in terms of natural disasters.

So, we should involve children in these plannings because they also need to know what is going on. They are children, and therefore, these issues affect them daily. We should also create policies to try to reduce the number of trees being cut down and remind people to plant trees and to create awareness on climate change to prohibit the rate of it in South Africa. The government should also create policies on war. One thing that I feel we don't address much is how much war can affect children in the country and how it can also contribute to climate change. The government should make sure that they deal with the causes of war and make sure that all children in the country are protected in the time of war, as according to Article 6, 19, and 33 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child, UNCRC. I thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Thank you, hon member. Group 2 is on Comprehensive Sexual Education, Teenage Pregnancy and Mental Health, and that will be done on hybrid, from Free

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State by hon K Mohalali, over to you. Can we be - oh, you are here? Oh, okay.

Group 2 - Comprehensive Sexual Education Teenage Pregnancy & Mental Health

Mr K MOHALALI (Free State): Chairperson of the session, greetings, hon guests and members. My name is Katleho Mahalali from Free State, schooling at Tswellang Special School and currently in Grade 9. Today I am going to talk to you about Comprehensive Sexual Education which refers to the teaching and educating young children about sexual aspects that can potentially affect their lives, considering factors such as teenage pregnancy and mental health as effects. Today, we gather to discuss a crucial aspect of adolescent health. Sexual education, as we navigate the complex of growing up is exceptional as we keep growing up. Our youth should be equipped with the knowledge and skills to make informed decisions about their bodies as featured in the right to identity in section 28(16) of the Constitution. Identity plays a role in shaping the choice adolescents make, including those related to sexual health issues.

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Lack of sex education leaves our youth vulnerable in unhealthy relationships. Identity can lead to teen pregnancy, shaped by what we listen to or to what we are exposed. Exposure to negative influence can have consequences. Mental health challenges are increasingly prevalent among adolescents. The impact: Teenage pregnancy and sexually transmitted infections can have long-term consequences on young people's lives. Mental health issues can lead to feelings of isolation, fear, and uncertainty. The solutions for budgeting and planning: Budgeting for health. Encourage teenagers to plan for their future by understanding the financial implications of sexual health decisions. Teach them to budget for their well-being and future goals.

The plan for informed decisions: Implement age-appropriate, inclusive education to empower youth with knowledge and skills for making informed decisions about their sexual health and relationships. For mental health budgeting, allocate time and resource for mental health support. Provide accessible, free counselling service and promote health coping and machinery as a part of planning for overall well-being. According to the Erickson theory of the psychosocial develop the stage of identity, the real confusion occurs during adolescence, 12 to 18 years old. Promoting constructive cultural parties can

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support health, identity formation, and better planning for the future. By working together, we can create a supportive ... [Interjections.] [Time expired.]

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): We will now call Group 5 because I am told that we need to swap. We are calling Group 5, Child Protection. The speaker is from North West, hon O Kabasia. Over to you.

Group 5 - Child Protection

Ms O KABASIA (North West): Salutations to the House at large. My name is Oteng Kabasia from the Northwest Province. Nelson Mandela once said, "there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children." Today, I stand before you not just to speak, but to echo the voices of cries of the children of South Africa. The problem is clear, too many children in South Africa face abuse, neglect, violence, and exploitation, both online and offline. These harms do not just steal childhood, they destroy future leaders. There are unsafe home environment, under-resourced schools, communities that are silent about abuse, laws that exist but are not yet enforced or implemented. Children living

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with disabilities or those in rural areas are mostly vulnerable at instances and are overlooked.

In the digital age, where we face a new battlefield, the internet, where cyberbullying and online predators thrive, for both, there is hope, yes. Child protection begins with awareness. We must further educate our children about their rights and empower them to speak up, strengthen support systems, train educators, improve access to counselling, and enforce existing laws. Child protection is not just the duty of the government, I agree, it is also the responsibility of citizens, and our mothers. We must take accountability as children, but we need help from the government too. If we do not hear their voices and protect their lives, Minister, we are really losing a generation and a legacy that were given to us. With that being said, let rise beyond promise and enforce the real change. I thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Thank you, hon member. Now, we will then go to Group 4, Substance Abuse. One member from the North West, hon O Kehitlhile. My apologies for pronunciation.

Setswana:

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Ke bua IsiXhosa, Setswana ga ke se itsi.

English:

You will correct me, and sorry, your time is one minute 30 seconds.

Group 4 - Substance Abuse

Ms O KEHITLHILE (North West): Hon speakers, fellow parliamentarians and distinguished guests, my name is hon Oratile Kehitlhile from North West Province, representing Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompati. Substance abuse is the excessive use of substances that are harmful for children under the age of 18. This is a violation of the Liquor Act 59 of 2003. Substance abuse affects children physically, psychologically and socially. The most common observable results is the behavioural disruptions mainly influenced by the parental substance abuse. The challenges that children and the community at large face regarding the issue is being addressed in the House.

Firstly, substances are easily accessed by children because of the large number of the unregistered businesses. Secondly, children are not aware of the vital information regarding the

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topic because open discussions are slowly reducing in schools. Campaigns are being attended by children, but the government struggles providing them with the feedback. We also deal with tokenism, whereby our opinions are taken for appearance's sake, not for the purpose of influencing the overall resolutions. The government has solutions on paper, but the problem lies when they have to be implemented on the real world. With that being said, I would like to say healing begins when we come together, not just as individuals, but as a nation committed to eradicating substance abuse. I thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Thank you, hon member. Now, I will call the hon member from Limpopo, hon Z Essop.

Ms Z ESSOP (Limpopo): Good day, House at large. I stand before you to provide solutions for the problems that my fellow hon member has brought up. We need to increase the tax on substances to make it less accessible for people to buy. When it's less accessible, less people will use it, resulting in lower substance abuse.

And people lack information about it. So, we need to expand the curriculum in the schools to give people the vital

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information about substance abuse and the dangers lurking around.

Three, we do not get feedback when we are doing projects. We need to provide quarterly or six-month reports, including the feedback, current statistics, previous statistics, to see our progress until the project is completed.

Regarding the unregistered organisations, police need to do searches at random intervals so that they can shut down and take legal action against unregistered organisations.

Five, children's voices must be heard. We need to make a way to find children-friendly programmes, especially disability-friendly programmes where kids' voices can be heard.

We have the law, Liquor Act 59 of 2003 in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC, but is it implemented? On paper, it means nothing. We need to make a point to implement the Liquor Act. I thank you.

Group 3 - Child Participation

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Ms F PHALANDWA (Limpopo): Hon members, I go by the name of Fundzani Phalandwa and I come from the Limpopo province, Child Participation. Despite South Africa's commitment to upholding children's rights, as outlined in section 28 of the Constitution and the UNCRC, children's voices remain largely unheard in planning and budgeting processes that directly impact their lives.

Children rarely have formal spaces like youth councils or school forums where their opinions can reach decision makers. Government and municipalities should create child and youth councils where children can express their opinions about community budget and development plans, ensure that this platform include children from different backgrounds, whether from the rural areas, urban areas, the disabled or the able, or the poor communities. As our hon Khazimla Adam stated, nothing for us without us. I thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): We will now call the next speakers and I want there are chairs on my left and right so that when the first speaker sits, the next one will then have to sit instead of coming from where people are seated, except if a person has requested to speak from where he or she is seated. Now we'll call upon Ms M Briede, program director from

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the Save the Children, as a representative. Thank you very much. Over to you.

Ms M BRIEDE (Save the Children SA): Hon Minister, Members of Parliament, distinguished guests, and most importantly, the children gathered here today. I'm Megan Briede and I represent Save the Children South Africa.

It's an honour to stand before the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, a space that reminds us of the many great truths that Madiba spoke, honouring the value of children. Today we are here not just to celebrate the voices of children, we are here to listen. Because the voices that we hear present us with wisdom, courage, and honesty that our nation needs now most.

For far too long, adults believed that children must first grow up before they can make a difference. But every one of you in this room, and particularly the speakers we've heard today, have shown us that change doesn't wait for age, it waits for courage. Each idea you share, each question you ask, each dream you speak out loud, all this matter.

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Your voices remind us that leadership is not about how old you are, it's about how boldly you care. To the adults in this room, and that includes me, I must say, children are not just that cliché that we always banter, children are the future. They are part of the present.

Their thoughts, feelings, and experiences must shape the policies, budgets, and programmes that we design today. To our true stars, you, the children, it is clear that every one of you here have earned your place. You carry the stories and hope of millions of children in South Africa. You are here to remind us, your leaders, your teachers, your parents, that your lives matter, your safety matters, and your dreams matter.

If you have ever felt unheard, let this Parliament remind you that your voice is powerful. If you have ever been afraid to speak, remember that change has always begun with someone brave enough to say, this is not right.

Today, when you stand and you speak, speak from your heart. When you share your ideas, share them boldly. And when you listen to others, listen with kindness. Because together, you are not only shaping the future, but you're also shaping South

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Africa's conscience, a conscience that we need, a conscience that reminds us to value our children.

At Save the Children South Africa, we believe that we cannot ignore the painful realities that too many children still face violence, neglect, and abuse. They are children who go to bed hungry, who are silenced by fear, and who still wait for protection that never comes.

But we believe, and I know that we can do better, much, much better. At Save the Children, we strive to find those spaces to elevate the voices of children. And as you've heard previously, we have supported young people on many national and international platforms to raise their voice.

This coming year, we commit to the Department of Social Development to help revise the child participation framework, grounding the principle of children's voices in the decisions going forward. Doing better by the children of South Africa is not the responsibility of government alone, we heard that. It is the responsibility of every adult, parent, teacher, faith leaders, and neighbours.

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Nelson Mandela taught us that courage is not the absence of fear, it's a triumph over it. And today, I look around this room, and I see courage in young faces.

To the children of South Africa, continue to speak, continue to dream, continue to demand a country worthy of your promise. And to the adults, let us listen, not with polite smiles, but with open hearts and a determination to act. And act is the word that we need to be following as the adults. And to say, at Save the Children South Africa, we believe that when we listen to the wisdom of children, we do not just protect their rights, we renew our nation's hope. Thank you very much.

Ms S MNGUNI (Nelson Mandela Children's Fund): Hon Members of Parliament, hon Minister, distinguished guests, representatives from the Department of Social Development, Department of Basic Education, United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, Save the Children South Africa, most importantly our outgoing legends and our incoming legends, child ambassadors and delegates, good morning. It is a privilege to stand here on behalf of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and Dr Linda Ncube-Nkomo in her absence. We're an organisation founded by Madiba. Therefore, as one of the oldest organisations he founded, we believe in servant leadership, and that's the one

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thing I want to drill home this morning. We are standing here as leaders but also, we are representing the Cwecwes of South Africa, voiceless children that cannot be here today. Let us not forget that our mandate is not to be distinguished guests alone but to be advocates of children.

For more than a decade, the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament has been a cornerstone of that very mission. A national platform where children from across South Africa come together to express their views on issues that affect them most. I'm quite proud of the work you've done in the past year, outgoing legends. As Dikgang has mentioned, you've done incredible work, including representing not only South African children but even African children at large, as you will recall at the African Children's Summit. Continue to do work that looks beyond your own little corner and into a global platform. Continue to be leaders. That's what South Africa is known for. We have raised leaders that have stepped into the global stage, not just for their own gain but specifically for the liberation of those that are vulnerable.

Today, for the first time in several years, we are honoured to gather in the National Parliament, and we are very thankful that we are in these very Chambers where decisions about the

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country's future are made. This moment reminds you, children, that you are not merely beneficiaries of policies, but you are partners in shaping policy. I hope you take that responsibility seriously. Through this Parliament, young people are learning that democracy is not a spectator sport.

I have been really privileged to sit in on your debates. Your thinking is revolutionary. If you implement that, you will change not only policy but even the way technology is designed. Therefore, I really hope that you take it forward.

For the fund, we are grateful that we are seeing you bloom in skill, in confidence, in participation in civic and community activity. The Parliament is one of the ways we ensure that development is not abstract. It is lived, it is heard, and it translates into local action. This year's theme, therefore, "Amplifying the voices of children in planning and budgeting for the realisation of Children's Rights," it calls on us to go beyond consultation. It challenges us to ensure that budget allocations, service delivery and even programme design is informed by the real experiences of young people - because when children participate meaningfully, we don't just plan better, we plan more fairly. Our commitment to you this morning is, like has been said by Save the Children South

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Africa, to develop and strengthen child participation in decision-making spaces, to partner with government and civil society to ensure that advocacy outcomes translate into tangible improvements in children's lives. To our child ambassadors, your courage and clarity continue to inspire us. I hope we can continue to make spaces accessible and safe for you all. I thank you.

Mr I AKHTAR (Deputy Country Representative UNICEF): Thank you, hon Chairperson. Hon Speaker of the National Assembly, who is not here, but hon House Chair, Mr Frolick, hon Minister of Social Development, Ms Tolashe, Chairperson of the Social Development Committee, Ms Masango, other chairpersons, deputy director-general, distinguished parliaments, esteemed members, partners from National Mandela Children's Fund, Save the Children South Africa, and overall, all young parliamentarians and future parliamentarians, a very good morning - all protocols observed. On behalf of United Nations Children's Fund, we are very proud to be here today at this historic moment to witness the 2025 Children's Parliament in real Parliament. You know, many times you get the sense that you are Children's Parliament, but you are real Parliament. Thank you, Chairperson, for this opportunity.

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This venue reminds us that children's voices are central to our democracy. The United Nations Convention on Rights as our child calls on all the member states to provide a space, to provide opportunities for the participation on the issues which matters, the issues which affect them. Today we heard them. There are so many issues which are affecting them where they're coming from. That's why UNICEF commends and proud to work with the National Assembly, Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and Save the Children South Africa and other young parliamentarians for their leadership in institutionalising this Children's Parliament within the national parliamentary system. This is really a good testimony towards realisation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Investing in children's participation is investing in South Africa's future governance and democratic setup. Therefore, again, appreciation to the government of South Africa for this one. This year's theme is: "Amplifying the voices of children in planning and budgeting for the realisation of Children's Rights." It's both timely and essential because investing in children is a real investment in future. Therefore, when we talk about planning and budgeting, it is important. It is like a body without soul. It's the same as you have a plan without budget. Therefore, body must be with soul, and plan must be

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with the budget. This is important that we are talking about today, planning and budgeting.

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 4, calls on all member states to allocate appropriate resources for the realisation of child rights. Today is a testimony of the government of South Africa. Today is a testimony of this Parliament to give a call to the international body that yes, we are committed to talk about planning and budgeting and we are committed towards the realisation of convention on the right of the child. Since 2011, through every Children's Parliament, we have seen that children participate meaningfully. Then the outcomes are very smarter, more inclusive and sustainable on all issues. Today, I'm really overwhelmed and proud to see that they have spoken on all issues starting from health, education, mental health, substance abuse, gender-based violence, climate change, all these issues are not alien. These are real issues affecting them everywhere.

Therefore, I call upon all parliamentarians, not I have heard that they were saying outgoing, you are outgoing from your role, but not from your responsibilities. You remain parliamentarian and change-maker on the issues which matters

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to you and your communities, wherever you are coming from, wherever your constituencies representing to your permanent Parliament on the issues you have taken up today, and we look for your commitment. As South African government is advancing towards the implementation of a midterm development plan through annual performance plan, and I believe some of the proceedings, some of the discussions from this meeting will fit into to make the plan, the performance plan, a meaningful, a realistic by allocating appropriate resources to those activities which are being discussed today in this Parliament House.

For young parliamentarians, I believe that you are not just guests for today. You are leaders today and for tomorrow as well. You are an advocate on the issues you mentioned for today's preceding, but also the future, and you are innovators. Innovators is basically the younger generation can bring a lot of new ideas, new thinking as a solution to the problem you face every day in your communities, or your communities, or your constituency is facing. Therefore, we look forward for your more innovative ideas in this Parliament, but also in other forums. Your participations ... Your participations help truly reflect the dreams and rights of the children. On behalf of UNICEF, I would like to extend

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my heartfelt appreciation to the National Assembly, to the partners, to young parliamentarians, incoming and outgoing to advocate. UNICEF remains committed to work with you today and tomorrow and coming years for every child everywhere. Thank you so much. [Time expired.]

Ms B S MASANGO (Chairperson of Portfolio Committee on Social Development): Hon Chairperson, hon House Chair, hon Chairpersons, hon Minister and senior management of the Department of Social Development and its entities, hon members of the National Assembly and most importantly, hon members of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, good morning.

It is a great honour and privilege for me to join you today at this special sitting of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament under the theme: Amplifying the voices of children in planning and budgeting for children's rights - a space that truly captures the spirits of democracy, participation and hope.

This event stands as a living tribute to our beloved Thatha Nelson Mandela, a leader who taught us that the true measure of our nation lies in how we treat and uplift our children. His legacy lives on through each of you - the young leaders

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gathered here today – who continue to remind us that the future must be built with children and not merely for them. I am particularly proud of this initiative. Our work is deeply rooted in protecting the rights of children and ensuring that every child in South Africa grows up in a safe, nurturing and empowering environment.

Today, as we listen to your voices and ideas, we are reminded that our policies and programmes must reflect the realities you live every day. The Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament is more than an event on a calendar. It is a platform for accountability. It is here that you, our young parliamentarians, hold us to the promises we make – the promise of access to quality education, health care, safety, social protection and dignity. You are not just participants; you are partners in shaping a better South Africa.

President Nelson Mandela said,

History will judge us by the difference we make in the everyday lives of children.

These words challenge us as legislators, policy-makers and public servants to act with urgency and compassion. They

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remind us that every decision we make in Parliament must serve the best interests of the child.

To the delegates, your confidence, insight and courage are truly inspiring. You are demonstrating that leadership is not about titles or age; it is about service. It is about empathy and vision. I encourage you to take the lessons from this Parliament back to your schools and communities, and continue being advocates for justice, equality and kindness.

To the organisers, mentors, teachers and parents, thank you for supporting these young voices. You are helping to build a culture of participation where children are recognised not as passive recipients of decisions, but as active contributors to the democratic process. We reaffirm our commitment to championing the rights of children, strengthening child protection systems and ensuring that no child in South Africa is left behind. We will continue to draw inspiration from the resolutions of this Children's Parliament in our oversight and legislative work.

To our young hon members, you carry the legacy of Mr Mandela with pride and purpose. You are living proof that our democracy is alive, dynamic and full of promise. On behalf of

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the Portfolio Committee on Social Development, I congratulate you all for your participation, leadership and passion. May this experience empower you to continue speaking out, dreaming big and leading with integrity. Congratulations, once again.

It is an amazingly exciting full circle for me personally, because it was in 2011 when I was working for the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund that we started the work of putting together the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament. So, I am beyond excited, I am beyond proud. Most of all, I feel beyond blessed to be part of this gathering today. Congratulations, once again. You make South Africa proud. God bless you.

The MINISTER OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT: Hon Dunjwa, the Presiding Officer of this august occasion, our House Chairperson for Committee Oversight and Public Participation, hon Frolick, Chairperson of my portfolio committee, Ms Bridget Masango, our Director-General of Social Development, Mr Peter Nechiphale, the Chief Executive Officer of Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Dr Linda Nqume-Nkomo, in absentia, senior managers from the Department of Social Development, both at national and provincial, senior managers from the Department of Basic Education, both national and provincial, representative from Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and Save the Children South

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Africa, all our partners and stakeholders, all the children in this venue and online, ladies and gentlemen, good day.

Sesotho:

Heitha bana, heitha! Heitha bana, heitha!

English:

Thank you very much.

IsiXhosa:

Molweni!

English:

It is my singular honour and pleasure to stand in front of Africa's greatest asset and future, its children. Thank you for kindly affording me this opportunity to speak and engage with you during this year's Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament. I have to share my sincere gratitude to the Speaker of the National Assembly and the Chairperson of the NCOP for affording us this august House and the precious time to be with us, of course, in absentia, however, represented by one of the seasoned leaders of this august House.

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The government of the Republic of South Africa, through the Department of Social Development, takes great pride in co-hosting this landmark gathering in collaboration with Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Save the Children South Africa, Unicef and office bearers of our national Parliament.

Let me take this opportunity to express my gratitude to the leadership of the partner organisation, the board and management of the partners for successfully ensuring our children's participation through their provinces, to engage on a regular basis with the key challenges that children face in our society and allowing us as national to bring children's representatives from all provinces to Cape Town, once a year.

In partnership with Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, we hosted the African Children's Summit, and we honoured Tata Madiba's life and legacy, amplifying the collective voice of African children under the theme: Seen, Heard and Engaged in Education. The declaration of the summit, which included the importance of African states that ratified the African Charter on the Rise and Welfare of the Child. The outcome statement was subsequently adopted a day or two after the summit, presented before the African Committee of Experts on the Rise and Welfare of the Child in Lesotho.

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The committee resolved to encourage all member states to initiate child participation programs. South Africa is continuously enhancing the voices of children on matters affecting them. It is worth mentioning that the South African Government ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, commonly known as the CRC - the first legally binding international convention to confirm the human rights of all children across the globe.

The Convention on the Rights of Children is a human rights convention that set out civil, political, economic, social health and cultural rights of children. It was the first international convention that the newly elected democratic government ratified on 16 June 1996. Five years later, on 7 January 2000, South Africa ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child - a broad regional instrument that sets out rights for children in Africa, commonly known as the African Children's Charter.

Since ratifying both the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Children's Charter, guided by our constitution, especially section 28 of the Bill of Rights, South Africa is focused on realising children's rights and fulfilling our obligation. Central to both the Convention on

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the Rights of the Child and the African Children's Charter is the principle that governments must always act in the best interest of the child, and that every child has basic fundamental rights.

It is worth noting that world leaders have not kept to the undertaking committed to when ratifying these international legal documents. If we did, your topics for this forum would have been different. Consistently, we heard you crying loud on the challenges that you are going through and on the difficulties that you experience, even though the leaders have committed into all this. Again, you were very loud in saying, "Don't just take decision; implement your decision." Thank you for that.

The main objective of this Children's Parliament is to promote child-centred dialogue and advocacy; empower children as agents of change; ensure inclusive and equitable participation; provide evidence-based policy recommendation; strengthen collaboration across sectors and provinces in the country; review and advice on progress; and raise awareness and mobilise for national action.

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Child participation is a fundamental right of children through which their other rights can be realised. The obligation on society through the state is to protect, respect and promote the rights of children and to participate in decisions that affect them are promoted by both the Charter on the Right of the Child and the African Children's Charter. The child-led Parliament, which aims to amplify the voices of children in policymaking and decision-making processes across the country, is also aligned to the AU Agenda 2040 and the recent Bogota 2024 Global Ministerial Conference to End Violence Against Children.

This Parliament must create a platform to agitate for accelerated action needed to realise the full enjoyment of the human rights and freedom of children in South Africa. Because it is led by you children, it gives you a collective voice to share your views and hold us, as leaders and government, to account on key issues affecting you.

These, include: Democracy; emerging technology and climate change, as you have articulated; promoting inclusive education for all children; the role of artificial intelligence in education; and addressing school violence, gender-based violence, and violence against children, amongst others.

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Hon Chairperson and Presiding Officers, it is indeed a great pleasure for us to be able to stand here and articulate all this that seeks to change the way we do things. According to the Unicef Children's Report of November 2024, high-income countries in the world will count for a small share of children by the year 2050, and Africa will be the one with a high number of children. This, then, means that Africa will be able to gain on the demographic's dividend.

We have to ensure and encourage that these are led by you, the children, wherein you amplify your voice as the future of this world and hold us in government, private sector and civil society, all accountable. We must be held accountable by you to ensure that the policies and law we enact are in line with what you will be adopting, so as to guarantee the future you deserve.

Ladies and gentlemen, we will not be able to achieve the above if the reality that children face in South Africa are still persistent. Children in sub-Saharan Africa are at heightened risk in a rapidly changing world, affected by extreme climate change, crisis-shifting population dynamics and widening technological gaps. The challenges facing children in South

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Africa are overwhelming. The prevalence of child abuse and neglect in our country is widespread.

Child abuse entails the physical, sexual and emotional mainstream of a child that cause long-term or permanent damage. Neglect is an act of omission or the absence of action, the consequence of which can be devastating to a child, as it leaves no visible marks and yet happens to be the most dangerous. Moreover, usually both involve infants and very young children who cannot speak or defend themselves.

Human trafficking is the fastest growing means by which people are forced into slavery, which is also a very booming industry. It affects every continent. My children, the importance of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament and the topical issues to be discussed here cannot be overemphasised: From shocking revelations currently emerging in the Jocelyn Smith's case to the mind-numbing brutal rapes that children experience.

The act of sparing no effort to speedily ensure that the perpetrators of rape are brought to book, to face the full mind of the law, is encouraging. As a country, we need to

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ensure that we support and protect our children in all gender-based violence matters and violence against children.

The third reality we need to confront head-on, as shown year-in-year by the quarterly crime statistics all over the world, is that more and more children are likely to be abused at home and in the hands of someone they know - those who have a duty to care and protect them. That is why we welcome the recent announcement by the Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, to publicise the list of convicted gender-based violence perpetrators and names of sexual offenders contained in the National Register of Sex Offenders.

It is for this reason that on our part in social development, we intend to scale up prevention and early intervention, such as Rehisa, which seeks to support community-based efforts to develop, enhance, and co-ordinate initiatives and activities to prevent child abuse, neglect and exploitation. The focus is on strengthening families and communities as the first line of response in case and prevention.

The key to this intervention is the need to promote child participation by listening, hearing and engaging the voices of our children, as per the recommendation of both the United

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Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child during the presentation of South Africa's periodic report. One way in which we do this is through the annual Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, a collaborative effort between the Department of Social Development, Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, Unicef, Save the Children South Africa, the National Assembly and provincial legislators.

As I conclude, I want to express my appreciation to the organising committee for working around the clock to ensure that our government, in partnership with the Mandela Children's Foundation, can and is hosting this important gathering. We look forward to receiving the outcomes of this Parliament from you, as we continue in our collective effort to build a better South Africa and a better world, fit for all children. I wish you, my children ...

Sesotho:

... bana ...

English:

... the best in your deliberations. I thank you.

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Thank you very much, hon Minister. We are now going to suspend our proceedings for comfort break and a group photo. Now, this is what is going to happen in terms of a group photo: When we go outside, we are going to take the stairs outside the Chamber. We are going to be positioned by people who know best how to take a group photo, and then it will be the children and the partner – the organisation.

Members of Parliament must assemble outside, and that will include the Minister. So, after that, we are then going to be back at 11:45. At 11:45, we should all be seated. Now, we are to take the comfort break. Thank you very much. We will be back 11:45. Thank you.

BUSINESS SUSPENDED AT 10:59 - RESUMED AT 11:52

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms M L Dunjwa): Order, hon members. Order please. Order, hon members. We don't do that. When the Chair calls for order, nobody should be standing in the passage. Lady, it's either you sit down or I take you out. We don't do that. We don't do that. You have to learn the correct way.

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Hon members, firstly, as the Chair I would like to apologise. We had an hon member who ... unfortunately at the time of the proceedings, there was no physical assistance in terms of sign language. So, that's why you will see there are two people who are assisting her. We would really like to apologise to her for that. Secondly, the House Rules still ... Phones must be on silent, please.

I will now officially hand over to hon Gantsho who will take us through the next programme until we go for lunch. Over to you, hon Gantsho.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Thank you so much, hon Dunjwa. Let me take this opportunity to greet our House Chairperson, hon Frolick and also hon Minister Tolashe in her absence. I also want to greet the MEC of Social Development from the Eastern Cape, hon Fanta and the chairpersons of the portfolio committees that are here. I greet you all. And, I also greet our VIPs that are wearing black today. Good day, we're almost there.

We had a long comfort break, hon Chair. You know, when we were seated there I whispered to hon Van Der Merwe that this is a very dignified plenary today. I think as old people we are

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learning, because usually when we are seated here, there will be a lot of heckling, a lot of noise, but you have taught us something today, which is that this is an honourable House and it needs to be treated as such. Thank you very much for your respect for this House.

We are now going to move to our second session. We will have speakers that are going to debate. Each speaker will have three minutes. We have a timer. We're going to be very strict, because there's quite a long list of speakers that are going to speak. We are now going to call speaker number one on climate change. We'll call Khomotso Meje. You will all debate where you are seated, just to avoid the traffic and all that. If I call your name, kindly switch on your microphone and you will debate where you are seated. The first speaker on climate change will be Khomotso Meje from Gauteng. Over to you, Khomotso.

Group 1 – Climate Change

Ms K MEJE (Gauteng): Chairperson, I would love to speak on climate financing. The first thing that we would love to request the government to do or the message from the children to be delivered is our request for financial aid, not a loan.

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We want this aid to be paid by First World countries or historical emitters that contribute the most to climate change. We want them to be the ones that pay more to solve the climate crisis.

We want this aid to be a sort of budget allocated to South Africa, which will fund investments, whether by learners who have innovations that can tackle this problem.

The second thing that we request is with regard to the integration of climate education into our system. What we want is for climate education to be included in the syllabus, firstly from the foundation phase. We are speaking about Grade R and Grade 1 until higher education, where even our architects are learning about the field of climate change in terms of how to actually build innovations and how to actually combat it.

We are even talking about accounting students. We don't want it to be part of a subject. We want to see it throughout the subjects. We want to see climate financing in accounting. We want to see climate education in the Department of Basic Education's books.

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So, we're going to need the Department of Basic Education as well as the Department of Higher Education to be involved in this. Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Wow, thank you very much, Khomotso.

You know, Chair, I take interest because I'm the chairperson of that portfolio ... which also deals with the environment ... the issues of climate change. Thank you very much, Khomotso. The second speaker is Simphiwe Dash from the Free State. Over to you, Simphiwe.

Mr S DASH (Free State): Thank you very much, Chairperson. I greet the House at large. Let me get straight to the point. Today, I'll be talking about the causes of climate change.

We all know and we all believe that climate change is something that is done naturally, but we as human beings also have a hand in causing climate change.

Firstly, we have greenhouse gas emissions. The burning of fossil fuels such as coal, oil and gas releases carbon dioxide. We know that South Africa has been producing

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electricity by using fossil fuels and it ... become a generation ... now.

Yes, we don't have a problem, but the problem we have is that it causes children ... and it also includes us as children because we might get diseases like tuberculosis, TB.

It also causes climate change, which is the topic we are talking about. It can lead to climate change ... such as floods, because the air or because the gas that is released in the fossil fuels goes up into the atmosphere. It also causes us to get the education we need because we saw the floods that occurred in Durban.

Secondly, we have deforestation and land use changes. The clearance of forests for agriculture, urbanisation and other purposes releases carbon stored in trees, and reduces the ability of forests to act as carbon sinks.

We all know that we have people who cut trees in order to make a living. However, that is not the way to make a living because we as children are being affected negatively. We know that without trees you cannot get oxygen. You know that trees also help us to get oxygen. So, by us cutting those trees it

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will be difficult for children's lives and that will make it easier for diseases like TB to get into us, which may lead to death ... [Inaudible.] ... in our country.

So, I would kindly ask the government to transition to renewable energy when it comes to generating electricity by shifting from fossil fuels to renewable energy sources like solar, wind and hydraulic power. You know, in other countries solar panels have become a permanent thing. South Africa is slow in producing resources.

In terms of sustainable land use practices, they must implement sustainable agricultural practices, deforestation and convention efforts or help sequester carbon dioxide because it affects us as children.

People must be prevented from cutting trees. People must be offered jobs because you have people who have qualifications sitting down. I don't blame them, because they finished school but are here because of the unemployment rate in our country. So, with that being said, government and all the people listening to me, thank you for your time.

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The CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Thank you, Mr Dash. Our third speaker is Thembela Nkosi from Mpumalanga. Over to you, Thembela.

Mr T NKOSI (Mpumalanga): It is an honour to bring this to your attention, hon members. I believe that South Africa has one of the world's best constitutions. This is substantiated by the 24th anniversary of the South African Constitution which highlights that the South African Constitution is one of the most transformative constitutions.

Now, we hear some of our hon speakers quoting from our Constitution and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, UNCRC, which are laws that govern us. Right? They quote in contradiction to social issues.

The national Liquor Act 59 of 2003 prohibits the sale of alcohol to persons under the age of 18. For the first group, we have the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, which protects children from malnutrition, and the recently adopted Climate Change Act 22 of 2024.

Now, these laws were established to create a democratic society built on values of social justice, equality and

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fundamental rights. This reminds me of a quote by a wise man who once said that the forest changes, however, the monkeys remain the same. We are given equality by word and not shown equality.

So, why do we have laws that we are not willing to implement? We wouldn't sit here for the whole day and deliberate on social issues only for them to be kept in an office table drawer.

With that being said, ladies and gentlemen, I believe the English quote clearly outlines that, actions speak louder than words. Thank you very much.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Thank you very much, Mr Nkosi. Our fourth speaker will be Wamashudu Betty Nyamande. I'm told that she comes from Gauteng. Over to you, Ms Nyamande.

Ms W B NYAMANDE (Gauteng): Greetings, everyone. I go by the name of Wamashudu Nyamande Betty, and I am going to talk about how climate change affects us mentally.

Sometimes it feels like the world is burning, not just outside, but inside too. We see floods, fires, people losing

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homes, and it is hard not to ask, will we ever, ever have a future? We are teenagers. We should be dreaming about love, adventure and our future.

However, climate change makes everything feel uncertain. It is not just the planet that's heating up; it's our minds too, our stress, our fear of what's coming next. Some of us wake up with anxiety, not only about school, but about a world that feels broken.

It is painful knowing we didn't cause it, but yet we have to be the ones who live it.

Yet, here is the thing. We feel this because we care, and we care is power. When we recycle, when we plant, when we speak out or just talk about it, we are turning fear into action. We might be young, but we are never powerless. We can start change right here in our schools, in our homes, in our community, because we are not just the generation that suffers from climate change; we are the generation that will stop it.

Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Wow, our speakers are doing great with time, hon Chair. We will now move to our last

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speaker on climate change. It is Bjorn Maarman from the Northern Cape. Over to you, Mr Maarman.

Mr B MAARMAN (Northern Cape): Good day, Chairperson and the House at large. Today, I am going to be talking about barriers to child participation in climate change.

Climate change is not only about rising temperatures, floods, and droughts. It is about the rising fear in the hearts of children who wonder if they will inherit a world where it is safe to breathe, safe to learn, and safe to dream. However, I believe, just as Harnaaz Sandhu once said, that our voices are important, and, when we raise them together, we can transform fear into action.

Let us be honest: There are barriers. Children are too often told: You are too young to understand. We are excluded from decision-making because our age is mistaken for ignorance. The truth is that our age is our strength. Our ideas are fresh, our hearts are bold, and our vision is unclouded by political divisions. The barriers are also poverty, lack of access to education, lack of dignity, and inequality. Many children cannot share their voices simply because they are denied the platforms. If we truly want meaningful participation, we must

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remove these barriers, create safe spaces for expression, and empower children with resources to be heard.

So, today, I ask that you do not see us as victims. See us as visionaries. Do not silence our voices. Amplify them. Do not wait for tomorrow. Act with us today, because, when children lead, the world follows, and, when the world follows, change becomes unstoppable.

I leave you with this: If not now, then when? Thank you.

Group 2 – Child Protection

Mr J LEMMETJIES (Western Cape): Hon Speaker of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, hon Chairperson of the National Assembly, Minister of Social Development, *in absentia*, the MEC for the department of social development in the Eastern Cape province, distinguished guests, and fellow young parliamentarians, good day.

Today, I speak not just as a child of South Africa but as a voice for every child who has ever felt unseen, unheard, or unsafe in the land of their birth. Our Constitution, the heartbeat of our democracy, declares in section 28(1)(d) that

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every child has a right "to be protected from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation". It further reminds us that a child's best interests are of paramount importance in every matter concerning the child. This is not a suggestion. It is a sacred promise written into the law. Yet, when we walk through our communities, we see open drains, unsafe playgrounds, unlit streets, and children left vulnerable to violence and neglect.

Let us remember what the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, article 6, proclaims: Every child has the inherent right to life. State parties shall ensure to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child. How can we claim to honour this right – the right to life, survival, and development – when a two-year-old can still fall into an open manhole or disappear without trace because there was no light, no fence, no supervision, and no system that cared enough to protect him or her?

If we do not budget for the safety of that child, then his or her right to life is nothing more than a line in a forgotten document. When I looked at National Treasury's 2025 Budget Review, I saw that, whilst South Africa allocates billions to social grants and infrastructure, there is still no clearly ring-fenced budget dedicated solely to child protection and

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safety systems. Under Vote No 19: Social Development, allocations for child welfare organisations either show negligible increase or are marked "dash", meaning no specified funding.

The silence in the budget speaks loudly. We have not yet made our children's safety a financial priority. It is unacceptable that, in a country where we can fund highways and stadiums, we cannot guarantee that every school has a fence, that every park has a light, or that every social worker has the resources to protect our most vulnerable. We are then forced to admit with heavy hearts that we live in an unsafe society, one where survival itself depends on luck, not on policy, and where the smallest citizens still live at risk because adults fail to allocate the funds that could have saved them.

So, today, I make a call to action – not just to governance but to the conscience of this nation. Let National Treasury establish a child protection and safety fund with a dedicated R5 billion over five years to strengthen child protection services, train social workers, and improve community infrastructure. Let Parliament require transparency. Every cent spent on child safety must be checked, audited, and published publicly. Let every government department integrate

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child safety into its planning – from housing to roads to digital spaces. Let us, the children, be part of monitoring how our rights are protected because participation is protection. [Time expired.]

Ms O KABASIA (North West): Chair, I believe that I am not the voice of the voiceless but rather the voice of those voices. Because of those voices, that is the reason I am here today, right? Salutations once more to the House at large.

I stand to reinforce our stance on the urgent need for stronger child protection. We have already highlighted the challenges: abuse, neglect, bullying, unsafe environments, and online threats. Stronger implementation of existing laws is needed. It is not enough to have policies. We need trained professionals, child-friendly reporting systems, accountability, and community involvement. Let us empower parents, teachers, and community leaders through awareness campaigns and training so that they become protectors, not bystanders.

Digital safety education is required. As we know that technology evolves, so must our methods of protecting children online. We must increase these methods. Nowadays, we have

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children all over the nation and worldwide – globally – that have access to social media platforms that are not appropriate for their age. We need to try and minimise that and implement a system whereby things like that will be restricted. Child protection is not charity; it is a responsibility. A safe child today is a stronger leader tomorrow. I thank you.

Ms U NTSUMPA (Northern Cape): Good day, hon Chairpersons, respected judges, and my fellow debaters. My name is Unathi Ntsumpa. I am from the Northern Cape, representing the Z F Mgcawu District, and I stand proudly in support of the motion: Child protection and safety is everyone's responsibility.

Child protection and safety mean more than just keeping children away from harm. It means making sure they grow up in love, peace, and dignity. Sadly, many children today are victims of abuse, neglect, and violence. Some are mistreated at home, bullied at school, or exploited in their communities. These are not just sad stories – they are a call to action. So often people say: It's not my business. However, when a child suffers, it becomes everyone's business because children are the future, and, if we fail to protect them, we fail the future of our community.

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The government plays an important role through laws and policies, yes, but laws alone are not enough. A law can punish an abuser, but it cannot heal a child's heart. That is why communities, schools, and parents – and even we, as young people – must work together. Teachers must know the signs of abuse. Neighbours must speak up. Friends must listen. We must create a culture of protection, not silence. The aim of child protection is not only to stop harm but to prevent it, by teaching respect and awareness.

When children know their rights, and when adults understand their duties, safety becomes part of everyday life. Nelson Mandela once said, "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children." If that is true, then our actions must speak louder than our words. Let us build a society where children feel safe to dream, to play, and to grow. Child protection and safety are not just responsibilities. They are promises – and those promises must be kept together. Thank you.

Ms N DINGO (KwaZulu-Natal): Greetings, hon members. I am Nontando Dingo from KwaZulu-Natal, and I will be delivering a speech on the topic, "Child safety and protection".

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Every child deserves a safe and happy childhood. Child safety and protection are not just parental duties but a fundamental right and a collective responsibility for our community. To understand how we can create a world where children feel safe and can thrive, we must empower children to trust their feelings. We must focus on their inner awareness. Children need to learn to trust their gut feelings and their bodies' warning signs when something does not feel right. They must be encouraged to have open communication.

Children must be encouraged to talk about how they feel – both safe and unsafe – by creating a space where they are heard and believed without being dismissed. We must set boundaries.

Children must be taught that they have control over their own bodies and have the right to say no to unwanted touch or attention, especially from strangers or people they do not know.

We must create safe environments. We must emphasise that safety must be a priority in all environments – at home, at school, and in the community. We must explain how creating caring, respectful, and emotionally safe spaces helps children feel secure enough to focus on learning and expressing themselves freely. There must be no secret rules. We must

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stress the importance of teaching children that they should always tell a trusted adult if someone makes them feel uncomfortable or tries to keep a secret from them.

In conclusion, as a collective, we must reiterate that protecting children is everyone's job. We must be proactive in educating them and in fostering environments where they feel protected. Let us work together to build a community where every child can feel safe, be heard, and reach their full potential. I thank you.

Group 3 - Comprehensive Sexual Education

Mr P DAMBA (Gauteng): Greetings to all distinguished guests of honour and all hon members. My name is Pallo Damba, a 13-year-old child ambassador from the province of Gauteng. Today I'd like to propose a prospective solution to teenage pregnancy as part of our topic's dynamic. I'd like to propose that the deputy secretary-general, DSG, and other stakeholders take the initiative to affiliate with institutions which are mostly cultural and spiritual institutions that constantly emphasise on the importance of marriage.

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In present day, we tend to wonder why teenage pregnancies statistics incline with powerful momentum, but we don't take into account the norms and customs that kept ancient society intact and powerful that are being replaced by modern unguided norms. Hence we would like that young boys and girls in society too are informed by authentic and credible sources about what marriage is, how it contributed to the wellness in ancient society and how it could potentially be a solution to the soaring statistics of teenage pregnancy. I thank you all.

Ms C MABUNDA (Limpopo): Good day to the house at large. I am Chantel Mabunda proudly representing Limpopo province and the Mopane District. Comprehensive sexual education, teenage pregnancy and mental health. The act of educating and enlightening teenagers about their sexuality is called comprehensive sexual education.

More than 51% of South Africa's population are stripped off their rights to dignity and safety by being raped, abused, as well as molested. Some of those being children, leading to feelings of shame, embarrassment, as well as depression, including long term impacts such as sexually transmitted infections, as well as unwanted pregnancies. Some teenagers

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are abused by their breadwinners, making it difficult for them to speak up.

Sexuality, some parents tend to distance themselves from their kids because of their sexuality. Violating their rights to express yourself freely in section 16 of the Constitution, contributing to feelings of isolation, depression, as well as social stigma. As a proud advocate for child safety, including gender-based violence, as well as equal rights, I believe we need to strategise in order to decrease the cases of teenage pregnancy, gender-based violence, as well as mental health. We need to put in more funds into awareness campaigns, form alliances with organisations and focus on grooming children. #I am because we are. Together, we can make a difference. Thank you.

Ms A BARKER (Northern Cape): Good morning esteemed Members of Parliament of Children's Rights, advocates and future leaders. I am Aleo Barker from the Northern Cape province. It is an honour to speak to you about a fundamental human right, comprehensive sexual education. We must view comprehensive sexual education, CSE, as a critical investment in our future directing and addressing the course issue of teenage pregnancy and youth mental health. We need to move past simple fear-

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based approaches and ensure that we are equipped with accurate age appropriate and nonjudgemental information.

In the fight against teenage pregnancy, robust CSE is effective because it doesn't just promote abstinence, it teaches the proper and consistent use of effective contraception alongside vital skills in communication and how is the relationship negotiation. This empowers young people to make informed choices, protecting their reproductive futures and removing significant barriers to the education and economic success. Crucially, CSE offers profound support for mental health. Adolescence is confusing and without reliable facts young people often experience immense anxiety, isolation and shame regarding their identity and relationships.

By creating a safe space to discuss development, teaching the importance of consent and mutual respect, providing inclusive resources for all students, including those who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Intersex, LGBTQI+, CSE normalises experiences, reduces stigma and build the emotional resilience needed to avoid exploitative situations.

Ultimately, comprehensive sex education is a powerful, proactive tool that secures your right to a healthy, informed and dignified life. Thank you.

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Ms D SITHOLE (North West): Greetings to the House at large. I am Didintle Sithole from the North West province. I will introduce the topic, comprehensive sexual education to you. Comprehensive sexual education refers to a curriculum that provides students with accurate and age appropriate information about sexuality, relationships and reproductive health, aiming to promote healthy relationships and prevent challenges faced by people living with HIV and Aids and have been a victim of teenage pregnancy.

It empowers people with knowledge, skills and values to make informed decisions about sexual health and relationships. Comprehensive sexual education can improve education in sexual behaviour and it can reduce potential teenage pregnancy. It can stop stigma by teaching children more about mental health and acceptance. Comprehensive sexual education is crucial for promoting healthy relationships, reducing unintended pregnancies and preventing sexually transmitted infection.

Here are some reasons why comprehensive sexual education is important. It empowers individuals to make informed decisions about their sexual health relationships and bodies.

Comprehensive sexuality education can reduce risk behaviours such as unprotected sexual intercourse, substance abuse and

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violence. Overall, comprehensive sexual education is essential for promoting healthy, respectful and informed relationships. Let us stand together and enforce comprehensive sexual education into our schools so that there can be less teenage pregnancies. Thank you.

Ms F PHALANDWA (Limpopo): Greetings to the House at large.

These are the recommendations of how the government can expose comprehensive sexual education to the people out in South Africa. The government can expose comprehensive sexual education by including it in the National School Curriculum to ensure that all learners receive accurate and age appropriate information about their bodies, relationship and their rights. This should go hand in hand with the amplifying the voices of children in planning and budgeting, allowing them to share their needs, experiences and ideas on how sexual education can be more effective and inclusive.

Teachers should be trained to confidently teach sexual health topics while parents, community leaders and health workers should work together to reduce stigma and promote open discussions. Through awareness campaigns, media programmes and digital platforms, young people can access reliable information that empowers them to make safe and informed

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choices. The government must also ensure that comprehensive sexual education includes learners with disabilities and is linked to youth-friendly health services. Finally, strong laws and policies should protect children's rights and ensure that comprehensive sexual education promote respect, consent, equality and meaningful participation of all children. Thank you.

Group Four - Substance Abuse

Mr B NDLELA (KwaZulu-Natal): I would like to start by greeting all the Members of Parliament 2025, and you, my hon chairman. I am Bayanda Ndlela. On substance abuse: I would like to start by the causes of substance abuse. First, it's curiosity. Children are curious. You will see your friends smoking cigarette there, and then you will say let me ...

IsiZulu:

... lokhu, eyi ...

English:

... I will speak IsiZulu ...

IsiZulu:

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... uzobona umgani wakho ebhema ugwayi laphaya bese uthi, awungishayise phela. Skuif mfowethu! Bese nawe usungenile kanjalo. U-one pull ubiza u-two ubiza u-three, ...

English:

... then you are addicted to cigarettes. Then ...

IsiZulu:

... ngizolandela ngencindezelo esuka kontanga. Uzobona umgani noma abangani bakho okade uhlala nabo Emini nasebusuku sebeyabhema. Bese nawe uthi ngisala kanjani bese uqala kanjalo. Futhi umholi weqembu lami uthe ngingachazi okuningi ngoba okunye kuzochazwa yilaba abanye. Ngiyabonga.

USIHLALO NGOKUBAMBISANA (Nk N Gantsho): Siyabonga, Baba uNdlela.

English:

Mr O KEHITLHILE (North West): Hon speaker, fellow parliamentarians and distinguished guests, my name is Oratile Kehitlhile from North West province, representing the Dr Ruth Mogomotsi Mompoti district. Substance abuse in families brings profound problems that affect them academically, emotionally, and mentally.

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Issues I will be addressing to the House at large are educational impact, emotional and behavioural challenges. I will first start by the educational impact. Since substance abuse is known for having mental issues such as stress as one of its outcomes, this limits the concentration of children on their academic studies. This also exposes them to lack of motivation for doing both their classwork and homework. The creation of these chaotic environments leads to poor school attendance and performance, reducing children's engagement and opportunities to voice their concerns through the influence on children for reluctance behaviour.

Emotional and behavioural changes: Substance abuse leads to children experiencing emotional and behavioural problems, further hindering their effective communication and involvement in planning and budgeting conversations.

The emotional burden can lead to serious mental health issues, including anxiety, disorder, and depression, negatively affecting their emotional stability and development.

Ultimately, their interest in participating in vital discussions like the one we are in now. I believe it violates everyone's right to development and education. Overall, this disrupts children's health development makes it harder for

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them to express themselves and have their voices heard in paramount processes, such as the National Mandela Children's Parliament.

Let us believe in the strength of every child affected by substance abuse. Together, we can break the cycle and build a future filled with hope and opportunity. Their voices deserve to be heard, and their best days are still ahead. I thank you.

The CO-CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Thank you, Mr Kihitlhile. Apologies for that. We are fixing the timer. We are going to move to our third speaker, Sbhongakonke Msomi from KwaZulu-Natal. Over to you, Sbhongakonke.

Ms S MSOMI (KwaZulu-Natal): Greetings to all hon members. I am Sbhongakonke Msomi from KwaZulu-Natal, and I will be giving us solutions about substance abuse. Firstly, we could have classes and counselling and also teaching stress management techniques like meditation and exercise. We could also improve sports around the areas where we could go and release out stress. And it can also help on improving your mindsets and being developed and responsible. We could also have a very tight searching session in our schools. Also, our outgoing speaker said that advertisement of alcoholic beverages or any

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substance abuse must be reduced. Together with your support and encouragement, we could do it. Thank you.

Ms L NKALISHANE (Free State): Good day to all my hon members, hon speaker, and the House at large. Today, we are going to deeply elaborate on one of the greatest problems faced in South Africa - substance abuse. In order to fix a problem, one has to identify the problem. We identified that substance abuse is characterized by a pattern of using substances such as alcohol or drugs that results in significant problems or distress. In the lives of children, the effects can manifest in various ways, including missing school, engaging in dangerous activities and behaviour. And while under the influence of drugs they can experience illegal and legal issues relating to substance use. Thank you.

Ms A L MOKOENA (North West): Thank you, my excellency. Hon members in the sitting and fellow South Africans who are watching at home, before you is our next policymaker, Angelina Lerato Mokoena, and hon secretary of the North West Children's Parliament.

Children's Act 38, section 10, obligates me to proceed with the following resolutions. I believe we can reduce or limit

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access of substance for minors. Have a strict policy which I would like to name Child Shield Act, and which I would love to compile if advised to. It will focus on zoning laws to prevent liquor stores, taverns, for example, from operating near schools or playgrounds. It will also emphasize data tracking to monitor high-risk areas and allocate resources accordingly.

Also, we can make job creations and youth employment. This can be an opportunity for us to reduce unemployment rate as we can create unemployment and skills development programs to reduce idleness amongst the youth. So our youth will be saving our younger generation, which is us, the children, while they are building our country's economy. This will be inclusive for all.

Therefore, we can link rehabilitation graduates to learnerships and small business grants. Estimated budget could be R450 000 per annum, which will cater for training centres and stipends. I thank you.

Mr P MPANZA (KwaZulu-Natal): Hon speaker, good day hon members, my name is Philasande and my surname is Mpanza from KwaZulu-Natal under Amajuba district. A wise person once said to me, "no one is safe until everyone is safe" meaning

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everywhere you go, you'll always learn something new. The topic we were given was substance abuse. I will start by defining substance abuse. Substance abuse is a complex issue that requires a multifaceted approach.

We move on to solutions for substance abuse. Education and awareness: We must educate individuals about the risk and consequences of substance abuse. If you educate persons about how wrong something is, I am sure one of the hundreds of people will learn and understand it.

And moving to my point number two. Healthy coping mechanisms: Promoting healthy coping mechanisms such as exercise, mindfulness, and creative activities.

IsiZulu:

Okunye, ezemidlalo ziyakusiza ezintweni eziningi. Ziyakukhipha ezintweni eziningi, futhi ngiyabonga.

USIHLALO NGOKUBAMBISANA (Nk N Gantsho): Siyabonga, Baba uMpanza.

Ms A NOBANGELA (Western Cape): Greetings, hon members. Today I'm going to talk about how substance abuse affects children.

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First thing is first, cognitive and academic challenges: Impact judgment and decision-making, memory and concentrating problems, decline in academic performance, increased risk of dropping out in school. Social and behavioural issues: strained relationship with family and friends, social isolation and withdrawal, aggressive and violent behaviour, and risk-taking behaviours, example, unprotected sex and reckless driving.

Long-term consequences: increased risk of addiction or substance abuse later in life, potential of chronic health problems, impact on future relationships and career opportunities. Specific vulnerable children in South Africa: exposure of violent crime or gang activities, increased risk of HIV/Aids or other STDs, limited access to healthcare or support service, and potential exploitation or abuse. Thank you.

Ms Z ESSOP (Limpopo): Hon Chairperson, I am Zahara Essop from Limpopo province and a proud representative of the Waterberg District. Now, before I start, I would like to thank all the Ministers and government officials who joined us here today. It is a great honour to have you here with us. Substance abuse is the excessive use of substances that are harmful to

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children, especially under the age of 18, which violates the Liquor Act 59 of 2003, which states that the underage selling of liquor is illegal. It affects children mentally, physically, emotionally and socially. The most common observable result is behavioural disruptions and isolation from peers and fellow children. It is caused by parental substance abuse, whether the child takes it directly or indirectly. I thank you for your time.

Mr U LUCAS (North West): Hon Chairperson and hon members, substance abuse among children is a ticking time bomb. Our government's budget and planning must prioritise their wellbeing. The statistics are alarming, and the consequences are dire. In South Africa, approximately 15% of adolescents have used drugs, with some as young as 10 years old. Furthermore, substance abuse among teenagers has increased by 30% in the last five years. We need a comprehensive approach that includes education, prevention, and treatment. Let us work together to create a society where our children can grow and thrive free from substance abuse. We owe it to them to provide opportunities for a bright future. The time for action is now. I urge the government to allocate sufficient funds to support programmes that work and provide our children the support that they need.

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Furthermore, we must address the root causes of substance abuse, such as poverty, peer pressure, and mental health. By doing so, we can prevent substance abuse and ensure our children have a healthy start in life. Let us seize the opportunity to shape a better future for our children and for generations to come. I urge the government to take bold steps in addressing this issue, and I look forward to working together to find solutions that benefit all of our children. Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Thank you very much, Mr Lucas. We will now move to Group Five. Our last item is child participation. I am told that our speaker is Thandolwethu Nogwam from Gauteng province. Definitely there will be someone. Okay.

Group Five – Child Participation

Ms T NOGWAM (Gauteng): Greetings, hon members and the House at large. My name is Thandolwetu Nogwam, and that's how they call me in sign language. The topic that I am presenting today is about child participation and I am focusing on the disability sector, especially deaf. The problem that faces the deaf sector is that we have serious concerns whereby there is no

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access to interpretation. For example, there is the issue of access to interpretation in the police station, clinics and hospitals. When I need to go there for ... well, there is no interpreter. Secondly, here in our province, for example, they need me to write down to express myself. We have nine provinces where deaf schools are very limited. Why do I need to articulate myself in that way? Because I use sign language to communicate, which is my unique hands. Deaf people, including all others with disabilities, face challenges. For example, you find out that at other places there are no rails or ramps, and there is also nothing in place for deaf people - there are no subtitles or any indication where to go.

Secondly, the other problems that we face as children, for example, where I am staying the school is very far. So, I have to travel many kilometres just to get to school. So where is the accessibility? At times I arrive very late at school, and end up missing periods, especially the morning ones. The most stressful issue in this child participation subject is that I do not feel included as a deaf person due to the fact that there are no interpreters. In the community where I live, there is no access for me to interact with any other person due to the sign language barrier. What I would love the Department of Education to do is that they should add South

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African Sign Language as a subject. We need curriculum advisers to add this Sign Language so that everyone is able to communicate with me or any other deaf person that they meet in the street. We need to learn Sign Language as it was officially recognised. I thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Thank you very much, Ms Nogwam. This is very interesting, Chair. I think as a society, we have a responsibility to learn sign language. It's very interesting. Our second speaker, it is Sesona Qhimgqoshe from the Western Cape. Over to you, Ms Qhimgqoshe.

Ms S QHIMGQOSHE (Western Cape): Chairperson, greetings to the House at large. I am Sesona Qhimgqoshe, and I am representing the Western Cape province. In the beginning, during the welcoming, our hon House Chair stated that a child could inspire a nation. We hear those words quite often here in this Parliament. But the issue is how can we believe that you truly support the development of children when there is hardly any investment in children? How come there is no simple collaboration fostered between all sectors - government, civil society, and the private sector - to develop opportunities such as job-shadowing for exposure? Because I truly believe

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that children with exposure are children who can lead a nation.

What Thando stated, regarding where our government has ineffectively integrated South African sign language, is an example of how the majority of our Acts and policies in our country are strong in form - meaning on paper, but weak in substance, in its implementation. This is the problem we face as South Africans. The government's failure to implement these measures sends a clear message to the society that it does not care about them even though it has the Ministry meant to serve the society.

Another point is that the majority of my hon members spoke about providing free counselling services and so forth across all districts in our country. The issue with that is that we have a shortage of counsellors in our country and we do not address this problem adequately and we also do not ask why is that. I think an effective solution would be a good collaboration between the Department of Social Development and the Department of Higher Education and Training in fostering and bringing together the training of those in higher education doing psychology and the accessibility of psychology for those in schools. Furthermore, I would like to thank each

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and every person here who was able to come. It says a lot about your character in governance. Thank you so much.

Ms M HOPE (Western Cape): Chairperson, good day esteemed guests and hon members. Alongside the topic of child participation, I wanted to put emphasis on this year's theme, which is: "Amplifying the voices of children in planning and budgeting." Since the progression of our democracy and the establishment of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, we have been able to integrate voices of the youth in decision-making.

The rise in child participation and its importance is directly linked to our growing number of youth. Not only that, but the number of issues that we face on a daily basis. Child participation is integral in addressing these issues, so much so that giving them these platforms empowers them exponentially. Through such programmes, our youth are able to hold government officials accountable, voice their concerns, and be agents of change. I also have a reflection for you guys. This year's theme for the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament turns the wheel of the futures of our children. Involving children in planning and budgeting expands the existing budgets that overlook issues faced by children.

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The discussions we have often end in the room filled with hot air and no action to follow. However, I must add that, alongside mentioning the issues we face, solutions are also proposed in our discussions as youth. This completely revolutionises decision making, as the voices of children being amplified sheds light on the extent to which it affects them. The intention is also to ensure a better functioning society and a better South Africa. This year's theme highlights the importance of our youth in reshaping our country and the amount of investing needed to empower them. Thank you.

Ms M PHUNYELETSO (Gauteng): Chairperson, I am pleased to greet the hon members in the House. I am humbly grateful to speak for the millions of children who are constantly silenced and ignored. While our laws promise inclusion, its practise is slim. Child participation is the right of every child, but it still remains limited and unequal. Learner councils exist only in names. Youth programmes are underfunded. Many children lack safe spaces to express their views. This reality violates the Children's Act 38 of 2005, section 28 of the Constitution and the Child Justice Act 75 of 2008, which guaranteed dignity, protection, participation of the child. But this can change,

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and we must act boldly through the curriculum's compulsory child impact assessment.

For all local, national, provincial policies, every new law or programme must consider its effect on children, and children must be involved and add influence in the process. Digital participation platforms are another example of solutions we can implement in securing online spaces where children can safely express opinions. Children should be able to report problems and contribute ideas to decision-making - reaching even those in rural areas and through digital participation platforms. We can also provide accessible platforms in all schools, councils, and community forums so that they can be easily accessible for us. We can also do work through that by capacity building, training teachers, social workers, and government officials in disability for inclusion and adaptive communication methods, ensuring that children with disabilities aren't just present, but meaningfully heard.

We can also achieve this through monitoring and accountability by implementing ways to track the participation of children within schools, forums, and policy-making processes, with clear reporting government bodies to enforce inclusion. Democracy isn't truly alive if its youngest members and

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government bodies don't enforce inclusion. South Africa must rise to its promise, because when children are heard, the nation thrives, and silence is no longer an option. Thank you.

Ms N TSHABALALA (Free State): Hon Chairperson, I am Tshabalala Ntombizodwa and I am representing not only the Free State province but also the children of South Africa. I will be elaborating on child participation. Section 10 of the Children's Act 38 of 2005 outlines child participation in highlighting that every child of such an age of maturity and development has the right to participate in an appropriate manner in any matter concerning them. In broader context, child participation means giving children the chance to express their views and be actively involved in decisions that affect their lives. It's not just about allowing us to speak. It's about listening to us, respecting our opinions, and letting us be part of the solution.

So often, decisions are made for children without asking us what we think. But we face many of the problems directly, whether it's in school, at home, or in the communities. It is often misunderstood that it is about the money. Yes, we do need recognition in finance, but mostly we are not asking for charity, we are demanding justice. We are not saying that

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children should make all the decisions; we are saying that our opinions matter. We are saying that we want to be included and that we can make contributes.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child states that when children are involved, wonderful things can happen. We become more confident, more responsible, and more connected to our communities. Participation teaches us that our voices have power, and it encourages us to use them wisely. To the adults of South Africa, we don't want to replace you. We want to work with you. So, support us, guide us, and most of all, listen to us, because when children participate, everyone benefits. I thank you.

Ms O BRAYS (Northern Cape): Hon Chairperson, good day, ladies and gentlemen. My name is Olwethuthando Brays from the Northern Cape. I stand here with pride and purpose presenting the children of the Pixley Ka Seme District. Before outlining the challenges that children face, I would like to make sure that we all know that when you invest in a child, you invest to the nation. Children are facing challenges of neglect. These children are left alone and have to be taken to neighbourhood houses, which leads to them having to be taken away from their parents and they have to stay with strangers.

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In these households, they may never get a chance to be part of planning or budgeting, but the decisions that are taken in the house will also affect the children.

Children lack control over their own wellbeing, as their needs may not be adequately prioritised, leading to poor access to essential resources such as quality education and health care. Children face financial instability and insecurity, as their family's decisions are not informed by their input. Furthermore, they may develop lack of financial literacy skills, development, and miss opportunities to learn valuable life skills.

I believe that children can take their place respectfully by sending letters to our leaders - the government. I would like to leave you with this: True progress will only happen when children are heard, seen, and included. I thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms N Gantsho): Thank you very much, Ms Brays. Hon Dunjwa, I think when we were introducing our House Rules, we forgot to mention that there is no use of cellphones inside the House - no recordings, and no taking of photos. It is unfortunate that we have to stop one of our hon guests who was

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doing that, but it is the Rules of the House – you are not allowed to take photos or record.

Let me take this opportunity and thank all of you for your robust debates. As Members of Parliament, we have listened. Definitely, they did not fall into that ... I do not want to use this phrase because it might offend some of our hon members, so I will leave it. But we have listened. Thank you very much for the respect you have also given me as the Chairperson. We will now suspend the proceedings and break for lunch. Thank you very much.

The proceedings suspended at 13:00

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): Good afternoon, hon members of this Children's Parliament. I'm Liezl van der Merwe. I'm the Chairperson of this session. I'm also the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. Good afternoon to hon Frolick, MEC Fanta from the Eastern Cape and my fellow colleagues. Thank you very much for chairing the two previous sessions, hon Gantsho and hon Dunjwa. Let's give them a round of applause.

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I also just want to take this opportunity to thank all of you for the very valuable contributions you've made today. I think on your leadership, your discipline, and just the ideas that you've offered Parliament today, we really want to say thank you very much. We have taken on board everything you've said to us today. We will take it to our various portfolio committees because you have said it very clearly to us today: don't just talk, but implement, act and protect young children. So, thank you very much, and also give yourselves a round of applause.

I think now we are getting to the session which all of you are looking forward to. We will be announcing the 2025 child ambassadors, and you will also be signing a pledge. So, when I call your name, please, will you come to the front. Then, after we have announced the new ambassadors, we'll also be announcing your new leadership, your president, your deputy president, speaker, and deputy speaker. So, first off, the ambassador that will represent the province of KwaZulu-Natal, Mpendulo Gumede, Free State, Simphiwe Dash, Eastern Cape, Sanele Adam, Northern Cape, Bjorn Maarman, Gauteng, Wamashudu Nyamande. North West, Arnold Malachi, Limpopo, Lefentse Mashishi, Western Cape, Tristan Fortune.

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Then I have the great pleasure to announce the new deputy speaker for this Children's Parliament, Fundzani Phalandzwa, from Limpopo. The speaker, Kedebone Diamond from Limpopo. I see a hand.

An HON MEMBER: Greetings, hon Chair. You missed our hon ambassador from Mpumalanga.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): There is no ambassador from Mpumalanga listed here. If I can be assisted with that name on my list. Thank you for that intervention. We will correct it in a second. Ma'am, your hand is up.

An HON MEMBER: Hon Chair, I'd humbly request for the other children to stand a bit further so that they do not interrupt the communication between Thando and the interpreter.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): Okay. In fact, if the new ambassadors can just stand to the back. You can even stand across this side, please. You can even stand onto the stage for those who want to. I wonder, sir, you that raised the point of order on the representative from Mpumalanga, whether you can put that nomination from the floor, because we do not have that name.

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An HON MEMBER: It is Mpilo Hlongwane.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): Mpilo Hlongwane from Mpumalanga, please come to the front. Sincerest apologies for that. Please just join them here. Thank you. Then I've got the great pleasure to announce the deputy president, who will be Tristan Fortune. And then the president, Amogelang Mashele from the Northern Cape. Okay, let's give them one more big hand of applause.

Hon members, you can now take your seats. We're going to ask the president and the speaker to remain behind. They will be signing a pledge with the hon Frolick. The rest of the team, you can sit down for now. I see the hand of the hon MEC.

Ms G B FANTA (MEC-Eastern Cape): Hon Chair, good afternoon to everyone. We are a constitutional democracy government that believes in 50/50. We must instil this gender balance, especially to the upcoming leadership. Seven-five, we are not comfortable about that. It would be better if it was girls that are seven and boys five.

IsiXhosa:

Iyabhalansa ke xa injalo.

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English:

But now when it is seven boys and five girls, I don't think we are comfortable. We are really not comfortable. It needs to be sorted somewhere somehow. Thank you, Chair.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): Hon MEC, I'm sure seven-five will have to do for now because they have been democratically elected. Although it's not 50/50 yet, I'm sure we are giving them this task to say that in 2026, we expect that 50/50 gender balance to be in place. So, hopefully when they come back and they elect their new leaders in 2026, we will see that 50/50 representation, if you are okay with that, hon MEC. Thank you so much.

Hon members, at the end of this process the new president and the new speaker will be signing a pledge with the hon Frolick. But for now, I'm going to call on the hon House Chairperson hon Frolick to give his closing remarks for today. Hon Frolick.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Chairperson, I would prefer that we sign the pledge now before I deliver the concluding remarks so that we finalise the formalisation of this chapter. So, I will be signing on behalf of Parliament

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and then we have the president who will also sign and ...

There's a number of people who must sign here but let me start first. I'm told it's the speaker who signed now, and now the president will sign.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): Hon House Chairperson, please take your seat. Hon Dunjwa.

Ms M L DUNJWA: Chairperson and sorry hon Frolick, I think there's something very important that ... in fact, I want to check the correct word ... is profound, that in the last 12 years, it's the first female president.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): Let's give her a round of applause. Hopefully, that will also make the MEC happy that there is now a female leader in charge. Hon House Chairperson, now it is your opportunity. Thank you very much.

The HOUSE CHAIRPERSON (Mr C T Frolick): Chairperson, on behalf of Parliament, I must extend our gratitude to all of those who organised and contributed to this event over the course of this week. I am extremely encouraged by the variety and the depth of the issues and insights that have been raised, and I have no doubt that decision makers will take them forward.

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We have heard during the morning's proceedings about why and how special attention must be placed on planning and budgeting and the implementation to address children's needs. We have heard that planning and budgeting and implementation must be strategic and holistic, and that different government programmes, whether at national or local levels, must be harmonised. I will come back to this point towards the end of this input.

Partnerships between public and private sectors with our international counterparts are also essential. These are the reasons for a co-ordinated and systematic framework. It is, however, imperative that plans and partnerships are informed by real experiences and by the voices of children themselves. For its part, Parliament will ensure that government meets its commitments and pledges, and when administrative shortcomings become evident, that departments accept correction.

Mainstreaming children's issues will be the responsibility of the relevant parliamentary oversight committees who have been represented in our session.

There were a few points made this morning around the lack of implementation. And I think it was one of the delegates from the Western Cape. Let me just explain to you how government

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works: In government, Parliament sits and make the laws, and say this is what needs to be done. And then there is a national Department of Social Development with provincial Departments of Social Development. Below that, social development serves the province through their districts, MEC, and so forth. What is becoming evident is that the voices we hear claiming certain things are not being done must be more specific so that we know what we are discussing. If you say that in a certain province something is not being done, state it clearly. My experience has been that in other provinces; other things are being done.

So, as young members of this forum, when we critically analyse government programmes, it is important that you, as the recipient of that service, clearly state if something is not working in your province. Otherwise, we will generalise. It is like when you are at school, and something goes wrong in the classroom. The teacher comes in and asks, "Who was it?" Everyone remains silent. Then, because no one speaks up, the teacher generalises and says, "Because something went wrong in the classroom, all of you will stay behind this afternoon until 5pm before you can go home." We need to be very specific so that we can celebrate where positive things are happening and highlight those areas where things are not.

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Otherwise, we will reach a stage where we just become a discussion forum and reflection forum. And I hope the mechanisms are built in through the youth ambassadors and representatives in the province where you can channel your direct experiences on an ongoing basis through to the Department of Social Development.

We have chairpersons of committees from Parliament, the National Assembly, who has been sitting here. Behind me is the hon van der Merwe, who is the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and People with Disabilities. We also have the Chairperson of the Multiparty Women's Caucus, the hon Dunjwa, who is here, and we also have the hon Gantsho, who is here.

And the issues of climate change, hon Gantsho, came through very, very strongly. And it is good to hear these very clear inputs coming from the young people that can be incorporated when we go to the climate change conference. So, we need to establish that flow of information between us.

We must develop the mechanisms through the Department of Social Development in the different provinces where the real-life experiences find its way into the system. I would like

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all of you who participated here today to keep also a close eye on Parliament's work. Now, in this age of social media, there's various platforms, and all of you must join those platforms of Parliament. Follow it, whether it is on YouTube, on Twitter, or X. It is a lot of them. Go onto the website of Parliament of the Republic of South Africa, and you will see a lot of things popping up there. But especially when it comes to issues that affect you directly.

MEC Fanta I, for instance, look forward to when committees call for public hearings on matters that were raised by these young people here today. That we find those inputs getting in there because it is not finding expression there. We have the practice where when a committee deal with an important matter, for instance with the safety aspects generally in society, that you do not hear these voices finding expression through those committees there. And it will carry so much more weight when these things are expressed in our formal parliamentary proceedings.

Public awareness and access to Parliament is fundamental for democracy. For us to build an inclusive and caring society and making people's lives better. We must also stay informed, as young people, on what is happening around us on the African

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continent. - What is happening internationally? - Human trafficking. There's a new form of slavery that is taking place where young people are deliberately targeted. Where very young children at a very young age are forced into labour and sexual exploitation.

So, we need to open and broaden the discussion so that we can see what is happening to these children. You can see daily on your television, TV, screens what is happening in areas of war and conflict. Whether it is in Gaza or whether it is in Ukraine or in South Sudan and other parts of the world. We can also see in our own areas where we are living in the different provinces where exploitation is taking place. And we dare that responsibility to remove the plaster and speak out. Because if you do not speak out in terms of what is wrong, it will become part and parcel of society and the daily experiences of our people.

I must conclude by saying it has indeed been an honour and a privilege to have hosted the 2025 chapter of Nelson Mandela's Children's Parliament. I also wish to again acknowledge and appreciate the collaborative spirit in which we shared our thoughts and experiences. And when we have these types of discussions, there is not wrong or right. You raise issues as

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they are. And we collaborate and work together towards its improvement. So, the committees that I have mentioned earlier, especially is tasked to focus on these areas. And when you go to the province's hon members and the other chairpersons who are not here, I will inform them, is we pay particular attention to these issues that has been raised. So that we can get feedback whether the laws that we make on paper meet and address the challenges of our people on the ground. Otherwise, the law is not effective. You make a law so that you can ensure that the constitutional obligation of the state is being delivered to the people. And where there are shortcomings, we need to be specific and say so.

I hope that you enjoyed your short visit, but important visit to the Parliament of the people of the Republic of South Africa. And I wish to thank you once again for your presence, for your kind attention. And when you travel home, travel home safely, enriched by the engagements that you had today. The collaboration that has taken place to play your role, your own unique role as a child in improving the situation.

I said to the hon Minister in absentia now earlier that when I grew up as a child, hon Fanta, we were not exposed to some of these things that children are these days exposed to. In a lot

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of instances, the childhood is removed from these young people. Because they must deal with issues that adults usually deal with. But there is hope. The flame of hope will continue to burn. And as Nelson Mandela said, "the child is not dead, the child is very alive." Thank you very much.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): Thank you very much to hon Frolick the chairperson, the house chairperson of the National Assembly.

I am going to allow Tristan Fortune and Kedebone Diamond to give a vote of thanks on behalf of the children. You will have 30 seconds each. But I will also say, hon Frolick, that on behalf of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, I will be extending an invitation to the new executive of the ambassadors here to participate in Parliament's upcoming statutory rape enquiry that will also deal with teenage pregnancies. Because I heard a lot of good inputs today. And we will be inviting you to give your inputs because I heard, for example, the Free State saying that you have been able to successfully deal with teenage pregnancies in the Free State. And we would need your voices so that we do not just talk amongst ourselves, but that we hear from you. So, our portfolio committee will be extending an invitation to

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you. May I then call on Tristan Fortune or Kedebone Diamond, -
who wants to go first?

VOTE OF THANKS

(Children's Representatives)

Mr K DIAMOND (Limpopo): If greetings was a cup of tea, I would like to serve some. Greetings to the house at its fullest capacity. Standing before you are Kelebone Diamond, the newly elected speaker for the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament. And I will be presenting the vote of thanks together with my colleague.

Firstly, let us start with the Minister. We would like to thank her for having her presence here today because she could have been somewhere else, but she chose to be with us, the children of South Africa. Moving on to the government officials. We would like to thank you guys for being here. Your presence is being recognised. The partners working together with the national Department of Social Development, your partnership shows a lot about yourselves. We thank the hon speakers for conducting today's session and for making it a successful one and keeping the house in order. Moving to the

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legends of the legends, we would like to thank you for your participation and you guys participated very actively so.

We honour the young souls who are fighting for their rights, often without a platform like the Palestinians. Your determination and spirit are a beacon of hope for a brighter future. Even though you are not here physically, just know that your ambassadors that are representing your provinces really appreciate you and are talking about the matters that are affecting your daily lives. Thank you for this opportunity. And as the speaker of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, I say the children are in good hands.

Mr T FORTUNE (Western Cape): Chairperson, hon Minister, in absentia, distinguished guests, hon Members of Parliament and my fellow young delegates good afternoon. My name is Tristan Fortune, and I am 16 years old from Mitchell's Plain, and I have the honour of serving as a child ambassador for the Western Cape and the deputy president under the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund. It is both a privilege and heartfelt honour to deliver this Vote of Thanks on behalf of the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament, as well as the legends we have all interacted with in the past year.

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Today has reminded us of something truly powerful that when young voices are given a place in rooms of leadership, real change begins. The future is not something we wait for, it is something we build together. One conversation, one commitment and one act of courage at the time.

First, I would like to extend our deepest gratitude to our guest of honour in absentia, the hon Minister of Social Development. We also extend our sincere thanks to United Nations Children's Fund, UNICEF, Save the Children of South Africa, Department of Social Development and the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund for your unwavering support. Your partnership ensures that our work goes beyond words, that it reaches communities, touches lives and builds futures filled with hopes and opportunity.

To the Department of Social Development and all our government partners, we thank you for your continued collaboration and for your dedication towards protecting and uplifting every child in our nation. Thank you.

The CHAIRPERSON (Ms L L van der Merwe): Thank you very much for those words and for the Vote of Thanks. I just want to say that it was indeed a very great honour and privilege to be

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amongst you, our future leaders, our future Members of Parliament, our future Speakers and our future Ministers and really thank you so much again for your time this morning.

Finally, I would like to announce that after the adjournment, there will be a virtual parliament tour which is supported by Parliament's Public Participation Unit. The presentation will play in this Chamber. So, participants may therefore remain in their seats. This then concludes the business of the day.

Thank you.

The Children's Parliament is adjourned at 14:29.