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MINISTER OF DEFENCE AND MILITARY VETERANS
SPEECH AT THE HANDING OVER OF CLASSROOMS IN MATATIELE, EASTERN CAPE: 20 JULY 2018

MEC for Education and Training, Mr M. Makupula,
MEC for Social Development, Women, Children and People with Disabilities, Ms. P. Majodina,
Chief of Joint Operations, Lt Gen B. Hlatshwayo,
Generals, Flag Officers, Officers, Warrant Officers, NCOs, Men and Women in uniform,
Mayor of Matatiele,
Representatives from various Government Departments,
Traditional Leaders,
Principal of Caiphus Khoapa Junior Secondary School,
Teachers and Learners of Caiphus Khoapa Junior Secondary,
Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It gives me great pleasure that we could all gather here, at Caiphus Khoapa Junior Secondary School, in the great company of our children – the future of South Africa – as we bestow unto them the greatest gift that a nation can ever give its children – education.

We do so with a clear understanding that an investment into the education of our young ones is what the founding President of a democratic South Africa and the inaugural Commander-in-Chief of the SANDF would have welcomed with a beaming smile.

This year being Nelson Mandela’s centenary, we are emboldened in our resolve to continue his long walk to freedom and his drive to ensure that all our children are afforded their rights to education and an opportunity to become the best versions of themselves, in a free and equal society that recognizes hard work and great human effort.

Today we afford the children of Matatiele, Matsetseng and surrounding communities their inalienable rights to education and access to a learning environment that would stand them in good stead to compete on an equal footing
with their peers from other neighbourhoods. The expansion of Caiphus Khoapa Junior Secondary School to 11 classrooms would rid our children of the perils of overcrowded environments and improve their chances of access to quality education.

As we celebrate Nelson Mandela this Mandela Month, we strive to emulate this gentle giant and our country’s liberation icon by doing good to our children – our future - even though we fall short at times. We use Madiba as our compass to ignite our humanity and sense of service towards creating a better world for our children and there is no better way to do that than by handing them the gift of education.

It was of course Madiba, who in 2003 at the launch of Mindset Network, an educational satellite multimedia network, in Johannesburg said: “Education is the most powerful weapon we use to change the world,” and what better way to alter the direction that our world takes for the better than by opening the doors of learning for our future leaders who surround us here today. With our youth educated, we can rest assured that the future of our country is in good hands.

There are no limits to the great things the children at this school can do, if we afford them their unchallengeable right to education as we do right now.
As South Africans, we need to hold hands in our diversity – private and public persons, public and private institutions - to invest in the future of our children because that is surely what would make Madiba beam with pride.

We need to all take an introspective posture, dig deep and ask ourselves whether in our own little spaces we have failed the children of South Africa by not making their attendance at institutions of learning as friendly as possible, to maximize their learning experience. We need to look into ourselves and ask if we are doing justice to the aspirations that Mandela had and tirelessly worked towards, to create a youth friendly South Africa that is the oyster in which our children excel. Have we selflessly carried Mandela’s dream of creating a prosperous South Africa that belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity and where poverty does not relegate some children to a life of doom and substandard education, while others beam with progress simply because of their access to upmarket education and a superior living standard? The question we should ask ourselves is whether we have let our revolutionary guard down and lost focus to fight inequality with all we have until all our people – especially our children - are free from the yoke of desperate want and dehumanizing living standards.

President Mandela once put it to us that: “South Africa inherited a highly dysfunctional educational system from the apartheid era,” and it was our task to work hard and fix this
unsustainable condition, but have we done it to the best of our ability?

Fellow South Africans, let us join hands, see no colour and contribute towards the Thuma Mina revival train’s quest to save our children from the claws of continuous inequality and poor education. Let us raise our hands and refuse to allow our children’s future disintegrate into hopelessness, simply because we did not act when our names were called to spring to action and act.

Let us invest more into the education of our children this Mandela Day and beyond. We have no room for excuses because we are suspended on the shoulders of giants like Mandela who cautioned us that: “There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.”

Let us spring to action, treat our children with respect and give them the best education our country can afford. From all corners of our hard-earned democratic republic, let us heed the call by President Cyril Ramaphosa when he said: Thuma Mina – send me wherever our country needs me the most. Let us all respond positively to be sent to help fix our education infrastructure by giving the little that we can afford to our schools.
As we mark the centenary of Madiba - our anti-apartheid and human rights icon, let us be inspired by his overarching humanity and that of those who strive to emulate him like the patriotic men and women in uniform from Prince Alfred’s Guard (PAG) in Makhanda (Grahamstown) under command of Maj Choche. PAG is a Reserve Force Company deployed in the Matatiele area mandated to patrol the Lesotho Border. This company was deployed in the 2016/17 financial year in the area and as part of its community outreach projects, identified a shortage of classrooms for the children attending school here and thus decided to act.

The unit set itself a target date to complete the expansion of the classes in July 2018 to coincide with the Nelson Mandela Centenary Celebrations and they delivered a tremendous gift of education to the children here, with the help of the Department of Public Works, Department of Education, the local municipality as well as local community members.

This was truly a SANDF and Community partnership with support from various other role players, and a great example of living a true Mandela legacy, by giving to fellow human beings less fortunate than ourselves. I would like to show my greatest appreciation to our soldiers who proudly stood on Mandela’s shoulder and pledged to run this project until the end. The people of South Africa, President
Ramaphosa and indeed President Nelson Mandela are proud to call you compatriots.

Today we hand over this great school in the capable hands of headmaster and principal, M.J. Lepheane, his staff and students who now carry the responsibility to take good care of the facilities here and maintain this vital institution of learning in tiptop shape.

As I close, allow me to borrow from the 44th President of the United States and American son of a Kenyan migrant, Barack Obama who during his Nelson Mandela Lecture on Tuesday in Johannesburg – themed: “Renewing the Mandela Legacy and promoting active citizenship in a changing world,” quoted Tata speaking to the youth, saying: “Young people are capable, when roused, of bringing down towers of oppression and raising the banners of freedom.” I want the students of Caiphus Khoapa Junior Secondary School to study hard and bring down the towers of illiteracy.

Heed President Obama’s wise words when he said: “Keep believing, keep marching, keep building, and keep raising your voice. Every generation has the opportunity to remake the world.” Remake South Africa into a better place for all to live in, it is in your hands now.

I thank you.