

SPEECH BY HISHAAM MOHAMED

AT THE ARNSA LAUNCH WC CHAPTER - 17 MARCH 2016

Programme-Director

Esteemed-Guest

Ladies and gentlemen

I PLEDGE TO:

Remove all prejudice from my heart and mind.

Respect the dignity of every individual regardless of race, in both word and deed.

Speak up in situations of prejudice, racism and exploitation of any person.

Stand in solidarity with victims of hatred and violence.

Acknowledge apartheid for the evil system it was, and while I'm not directly responsible for its legacy, I am responsible for how I respond to it today.

Listen and join the dialogue on racial equality with patience, understanding and respect.

I want to thank the **Anti Racism Network Of Sa** for inviting the DOJCD to this conversation this evening and hopefully we will inspire each other into dialogue that will help to eradicate the scourge of racism in SA.

As we know human dignity, equality and freedom are the pillars of democracy and the violation thereof is very serious.

We there for salute the various collective efforts and initiatives undertaken by all to combat racism.

It is initiatives such as these that have the potential to take forward the work done by our icons such as Nelson Mandela, Ahmed Kathrada and numerous other stalwards.

We hope that South Africans over the next few months and particularly over anti -racism week, supports efforts that aim to eradicate racism from society and build a non racial society.

As many have said the campaign is about finding each other as South Africans and recognizing the common humanity we all have and the dignity we all are entitled to.

We are also happy that SACTWU is bringing the campaign to the workplace.

Government's national consultative dialogue to launch the public consultation process on the national action plan to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance took place here in Cape Town at Century City on 29 February 2016.

The NAP is not intended to replace existing laws and policies, but will complement existing legislation (unfair discrimination, harassment, hate speech) and programs which aim to address equality and discrimination. The dialogue was thus around issues of racism.

HUMAN RIGHTS DAY:

It is also a pleasure to be able to address you today –because in a few days' time we will be celebrating Human Rights Day. As we celebrate Human Rights Day on Monday, we reflect on the tragic events that took place at Sharpeville on the 21st of March 1960.

Less than 10 kilometres from here lies the township of Langa.

When we commemorate those who lost their lives at Sharpeville, we must also remember those of Langa. Official records show that two people lost their lives and 47 were wounded in Langa when police opened fire on a crowd of anti-pass protestors on that fateful day.

Sharpeville and Langa set in motion a range of history-changing events. At the end of March, a group of 30 000 people marched from Langa to Cape Town in protest.

Sharpeville and Langa happened 56 years ago – in the history of a nation 56 years is not a long time. We have come a long way in a short space of time.

South Africa has been witness to ugly incidents of racism in recent times, the cumulative effect of which could lead to doubt that non-racism will ever take root in our country.

It is easy – particularly after the Penny Sparrows, Chris Harts and Velaphi Khumalos in our country – to become pessimistic and think that a non-racist, non-sexist society is a nice-to-have, an ideal to which we should strive, while sceptically harbouring doubts that it can be achieved in real life.

But I want to argue it from a different angle – namely that as much as we all were angered by the various racist rants of people earlier this year, it did succeed in achieving one thing – a renewed focus on eradicating racism and racial discrimination.

On 29 February 2016, we unveiled our National Action Plan (NAP) to combat racism to the public at Century City.

According to the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, Racism involves deep rooted prejudices of whites and the many recollections by blacks of the injustice sustained during legalised racism. The debate about racism is still constrained and polarised. There is still a long way to go before South Africans will enter into a balanced dialogue that deals with how to transform social and economic exclusion as well as how to transform our social relations in order to build a more reconciled nation.

We cannot afford to gloss over our difference as a multicultural society and the legacy of our history of segregation which is still in existence in our society. Our homes, schools, churches and workplaces continue to bear testimony to this.

The question of racism must invariably remain in the public limelight so that South Africans can engage with it in public forums and in the media. This is what the NAP seeks to achieve.

The National Action Plan is not intended to replace existing laws and policies, but will complement existing legislation, policies and programmes which address equality and discrimination.

It is not Government's NAP, it is not only civil society's NAP, it is our country's NAP and the challenge lies therein as to how to ensure that all our people are given the opportunity to provide input in the process. Ultimately, ownership of the NAP should reside with the people.

You will see that there are action tables in the NAP. Action tables that are currently blank and have been left blank for a reason.

Because the action plans cannot be something that government decides on and then simply imposes on people. It cannot be a one-way exercise.

We need to hear from, for example, our religious leaders about what can be done to promote interfaith understanding and respect. The youth must tell us what can be done to practically address racism and racial discrimination in our schools and tertiary institutions of learning.

What has emerged is that there are many of our people who are prepared to stand up and say "racism, not in my name" and "RacismStopsWithMe". This is progress in itself and something that we can build on.

Social media has, in some cases, become an outlet for untrammelled racism. The media and other means of public communication, such as the Internet and social media, play a crucial role in enabling free expression and the realization of equality. But while

freedom of expression and freedom of religion or belief are mutually dependent and reinforcing, freedom of expression must not impinge on the right to dignity.

The media is one of the main stakeholders that we have identified in as playing a crucial role in the NAP.

In addition to their central role in democratic society the media wields immense power in influencing and shaping people's mind-sets and attitudes through their coverage by drawing attention to the occurrence of incidents of racism while putting them into the right context and developing awareness-raising initiatives to sensitize the population to the adverse effects of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance.

Ladies and gentlemen,

No person is born a racist. If one looks at little children playing, they all play together, they have no issue with difference – often they do not even speak the same language, but somehow they all understand each other. Madiba said it best when he said –

“No one is born hating another person because of the colour of his skin, or his background, or his religion. People learn to hate, and if they can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite.”

This years commemoration takes place under the **theme: “South Africa united against racism”**.

As part of the government's 2016 programme, Human Rights Day on Monday will include the slogan #TakeOnRacism; # Not in my Name.,.#RacismStopsWithMe