

Africa needs resilience to stand against food insecurity and corruption

By **Bridget Masango MP** – DA Shadow Minister of Social Development

Honourable Chairperson,

As we join our sister countries on the continent to celebrate Africa Day, in spite of the challenges the continent continues to face, we echo the pledge made on the 25 May 1963 by the Emperor Haile Selassie when he said “*May this convention of union last 1 000 years*”.

Honourable Chair, if there was a time when the continent of Africa needed strong resilience and sustainability in nutrition and food security, that time was now. But a question has to be asked; what weakened the resilience and sustainability in nutrition and food security in Africa?

The answer to that question lies in factors that are beyond the continent’s control – many can be put at the doors of different governments and their leadership. That is where the strengthening will find its origin.

There have been events unique to Africa, both self-inflicted and inevitable. Among those beyond her control, one can include climate change, pandemics including the devastating Covid-19 pandemic, drought, and the recent floods in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape. The need for resilience against these disasters are justified.

However, resilience against conflict, corruption and greed is asking too much from the battered citizens of Africa, given the fact that resilience, according to Oxford Dictionary, means “*the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties*”. Africa’s difficulties have been ongoing unrelenting, unending and hard hitting, and they have not given the continent (or her citizens) time and space to recover quickly.

Honourable Chairperson, statistics on food insecurity are staggering and are testing the resilience, courage and fortitude of millions of Africans; forcing many, against their will to leave their home countries just to survive.

Take for example South Africa’s shocking statistics where food insecurity is concerned:

According to StatsSA, in 2020 almost 23.6% of South Africans were affected by moderate to severe food insecurity, while almost 14.9% experienced severe food insecurity. We have confirmed statistics of 3 886 children under the age of 5 years dying in South Africa’s medical facilities from acute malnutrition in the past five years. These figures, honourable Chairperson, are children who die in medical facilities – which means the picture is bleaker when one includes children dying at home.

This is hardly surprising given the runaway food prices so many unemployed people can ill afford.

According to Pietermaritzburg Economic Justice and Dignity Group’s Household Affordability Index in April 2022, a household food basket increased by 2.1% from R4 450.09 in March to R4542. 93 in April. It is deeply concerning that government uses none of this readily available data to make decisions that affect millions of South Africans. For example, what is the SRD grant of R350 based on? What scientific evidence was this based on?

This picture is mirrored by an estimated 346 million people in Africa who are facing severe food insecurity. It gets even tougher to strengthen resilience when reports say Africa's numbers of undernourished people is growing faster than in any other region of the world.

Honourable Chairperson, I submit to you that although Africa's people might be experiencing the most difficult of times in recent history, all is not lost. The men and women sitting in this and many other chambers throughout the continent, enabled by their constitutions, can play a role in ensuring that the theme of today's Africa Day is realised in the foreseeable future.

We owe it to the pioneers who fought gallantly for us to celebrate Africa Day today.

We also owe it to future generations to bequeath to them a continent worth celebrating.

Honourable Chair, I dare politicians to take personal and collective responsibility to reflect on the state of the continent and restore it to an active contributor to the global village and a courageous player among the nations of the world.

May the words I kept seeing during my research on Africa for this input, which are extreme hunger; drought; conflict; and corruption be replaced by abundance; high employment; harvest; peace; and justice.

And lastly chairperson, may God bless Africa and her people.