

## **Department for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities is completely out touch with the realities of the most vulnerable South Africans**

By *Luyolo Mphithi MP – DA Shadow Minister on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities*

As a member of the portfolio committee on women, youth and persons with disabilities, in performing its constitutional oversight mandate, I engaged with the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, the National Youth Development Agency (NYDA) and the Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) on their respective Annual Performance Plans for 2022/23 and revised Strategic Plans. One thing that was clear from this engagement was that we have a Department that is completely out touch with the realities of the most vulnerable South Africans and a Minister that has never taken considered the many cries of women, youth and persons with disabilities.

This is a Department that is bank-rolled by South Africans to do absolutely nothing but pay the salaries of officials. This Department can claim absolutely no successes in this term of Parliament. It has been unable to respond decisively to gender-based violence, youth unemployment and the continued sidelining of the disabled community. It's been unresponsive, uncaring, and lacked innovation address the problems we have personally seen while doing oversights in the North West and Gauteng.

Just a few weeks ago, we visited a woman who was bed-ridden for over 10 years with no wheelchair. The Department had promised to assist the woman but a week later there was still no assistance. We called the said official who made up all the excuses in the world of why they had failed to help uMama. We have officials who earn a tremendous amount of money who are simply not doing the work to help communities on the ground. There are some really great officials who are trying their best to contribute to the betterment of this country but they are far and few between. We need to get rid of people who are not serious about their jobs.

The DA has strongly suggested that the Department should ensure that its key performance indicators and targets are SMART. This means not allocating millions to a programme that only has key performance indicators about producing reports through consultants. A quick example is the Department spending R2.3 million on consultants to write reports and collect data. One wonders what the officials are doing – noting that 19 staff members are paid more than R1.2 million per annum. We need real change on the ground. People across the country are telling us that they do not see a government at work, a government fighting on behalf of them, a government serving them. And they are right because there isn't one.

The Auditor-General of South Africa's assessment of the Department's APP for 2022/23 indicated that the targets of the Department are not well structured, not well verified, not well defined and do not reflect the mandate of the Department. The Department has constantly lamented about being a regulator instead of an implementer, yet have not been able to finalise frameworks and update policy.

We noted with great concern that the Department has proposed a merger of the programmes focusing on the rights of persons with disabilities and youth development with no justification provided; at a time where both programmes require focus. It is clear that as it stands the Department's work and image remains poor within government and society at large.

On youth development – we were concerned that the Department's target was to produce four youth reports for the financial year 2022/23 that will do nothing for young people. It's unclear how the

Department would be driving youth development in the country when its targets are focused on the production of reports.

On the NYDA; the DA notes the NYDA Amendment Bill appeared in a recent ATC which presents an opportunity to concise interventions in the fight against youth unemployment. We further note the proposed South African Youth Development Bill's inclusion of Youth with Disabilities. We note with concern the vacancies in the NYDA for regional manager positions for the Eastern Cape, Northern Cape and Western Cape.

On the CGE, the DA noted with great concern that the CGE can no longer offer legal advice to clients, jeopardizing legal clinics and litigation. This matter has been unresolved since 2020. As it stands, the CGE does not have an HOD for legal services. This leaves many victims and survivors of gender-based with one less avenue to find justice. The DA has questioned whether the Chief Executive Officer violated the policy of the Commission on establishing an interview panel with external stakeholders for interviews.

The truth about this APP is that there is less for our people and more to be consumed by the Department itself. This is the ANC way. The way of countless bloated entities and unnecessary departments often with overlapping mandates and functions all created to distribute a piece of the pie.

The DA way entails streamlining the work of government in confronting the challenges facing our people. This would mean less money used as a form of patronage in the duplication of bureaucratic functions and offices and more money actually working for the people. In other words, less money to fund the business of government and more money to fund the businesses of the youth.

Too many millions and billions have been blown without substantive change on the ground by this Department. What have the successes been? What are the goals achieved? What tangible change has happened in communities? We must ask ourselves whether a department that spends millions on reports is genuinely working for the people. If it is not working for the people who is it working for? In conclusion Chairperson, there's absolute no progress just vibes.

Thank you.