

## **Human Rights Day cannot be commemorated until every child has access to safe and dignified sanitation in schools**

Speech by **Bax Nodada MP, DA Shadow Minister of Basic Education**

Chairperson

Yesterday the DA visited the family of the late 4-year-old Langalam Viki who tragically drowned in a pit toilet at her school in Esqithini, Eastern Cape last week.

I cannot describe the level of pain I felt as I walked in her final footsteps before she was swallowed by faeces, *sithe sisondele sakhawulelwa livumba lendle elithee lathatha ubomi balentwazana kabuhlungu kangaka*.

As the father of a 4-year-old, this shattered me. I can only imagine what her mother, *usis Nangamso* is going through.

There is no greater pain than having to bury your child, and under such traumatic and undignified circumstances.

No child should have to meet this fate almost 30 years after the dawn of our democracy – schools are meant to be safe havens that cultivate a better future for our children, not the graveyards this government has turned them into.

Sadly, South Africans have become desensitised to these tragic deaths, which occur too frequently in provinces across the country under ANC-run governments.

There is no sense of urgency nor political will to eradicate pit toilets.

Just this month the Eastern Cape Department of Education returned R100 million meant to deal with dangerous and dilapidated infrastructure.

These are signs of an uncaring government that would rather see our children die before they act.

How many children need to die before you and your MECs eradicate these pit toilets, Minister Motshekga? Maybe you would care or have a sense of urgency if it was your grandchildren.

On Human Rights Day, the DA has launched a plan to eradicate school pit toilets across South Africa to ensure that no family ever endures the tragedy suffered by the Viki-family.

The drowning of our children in pit toilets goes far beyond a human rights violation – it is a horror that no parent should ever be forced to endure.

The DA will take legal action against national and provincial governments to find the quickest and most effective means to instruct them to erect proper sanitation facilities for all schoolchildren as a fundamental human right.

We will work with civil society organisations that care about our children's future to build a strong case against this uncaring government.

The 2021 National Education Infrastructure Management System report revealed that 5 167 public schools still use pit toilets. Yet in answers to parliamentary questions, Minister Motshekga has stated that only 3 898 schools were initially identified.

These wildly differing numbers in the Minister's answers to parliamentary questions and the NEIMS report indicates that the Department is either not on top of the situation, or is trying to hide the serious extent of the problem.

That is why as the DA's Shadow Minister of Basic Education, I have launched a countrywide campaign to eradicate pit toilets, which will include widespread oversight visits of all school infrastructure, or a lack thereof, which may place the lives of children at risk. This campaign kicked off yesterday where we sought to assess the sanitation facilities at Mcwangele school where little Langalam tragically died.

We cannot commemorate Human Rights Day until every child has access to safe and dignified sanitation in schools. As South Africans commemorate our hard-won human rights, we must never lose sight of the basic rights of which millions are still deprived.

The DA will ensure that freedom is afforded to all South Africans, even the 4-year-old child without a voice who simply wishes to use the bathroom safely at school.

The DA will honour the memories of Langalam and the other children who were killed in pit toilets by this government by ensuring that every single dangerous pit toilet or sanitation facility is removed in schools.

In memory of Langalam Viki, DA Leader John Steenhuisen has managed to secure a scholarship for her older sister to go to university.

Anga umphefumlo Ka Langalam anga phumla ngoxolo, nomoya Ka Thixo athomalalise inhliziyo Ka mama wakhe usis Nangamso ne family yakhe yonke.

I thank you