

## **Malnutrition and child deaths a tragedy and indictment against government**

**Speech By Marina van Zyl MP, DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Basic Education**

**“Creating a better future for children through human development and health provision”**

Creating a better future for children through human development and health provision

Children learn better if they are not hungry or sick.

Yet, 12 582 children under the age of 5 died in public hospitals due to malnutrition over the last decade. This is the unfortunate reality that many children face under the rule of the uncaring ANC.

While we understand that it is the responsibility of the parents to ensure that children’s basic needs are met; the reality however is that South Africa is a country of extreme socio-economic disparities that must be considered.

Unemployment is at an all-time high with an estimate of 13.8 million people living below the poverty line. Cost of living has rocketed, leaving many families desperate and unable to care for themselves and their children.

Malnutrition impacts a learner’s cognitive abilities, physical stamina, and emotional well-being. When children are ill or malnourished, they are more likely to miss school and tend to struggle with learning. In the current environment, children cannot achieve their full potential.

The National School Nutrition Program caters for nearly 9 million children in South Africa. This gives these parents hope that their children would at least get one meal a day, as this is sometimes the only meal that they receive that day.

The ANC government in KZN must hang their heads in shame that in that province children did not even get this one meal a day. The uncaring ANC MEC of Basic Education, Mbali Frazer’s head must roll. Yet the Premier has publicly stated that her job is safe!

A decision by MEC Frazer to centralise the National School Nutrition Program has left children hungry, under her watch.

And does the ANC government learn from this tragedy? Of course not. They still seek to centralise functions through the BELA Bill, which will have a negative effect on the basic education system in South Africa, as was proven with this school nutrition failure.

Investing in human development and healthcare is critical to creating a better future for children. Children who have access to quality healthcare and education from an early age are more likely to lead successful, healthy and meaningful lives. The uncaring ANC government is failing on both the education system as well as the healthcare system.

Another area that contributes to human development is proper sanitation and clean water. Well, we already know that children are dying in pit toilets as the government is not addressing this fast enough. 25% of schools still have unreliable water supply and 22% still have pit toilets. 2 130 schools only have pit toilets. If we want to create a conducive environment where children will prosper and thrive in an educational setting, this needs to be addressed very fast.

The false promises of the past 29 years will not cut it anymore. The ANC's abbreviation now directly translates into Absolutely No Consequences. There is Absolutely No Consequences for these Ministers that are failing the poorest of poor people in South Africa. They live lavish lifestyles, in State paid mansions fitted with generators and the like, while the rest of the country suffers.

These Ministers also have Absolutely No Clue about what is actually happening to people on the ground. Absolutely No Consequences, Absolutely No Clue, Absolute No Care – this is what the ANC embodies.

The 2024 National and Provincial Elections are fast approaching and John Steenhuisen's Moonshot Pact will ensure that we create a better future for our children. Now is the time to vote for that better future and join the DA.

Children must thrive, not fight to survive!