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NAPTOSA WORLD TEACHERS' DAY MESSAGE

5 October 2020 is World Teachers' Day, celebrated under the universal theme of **"Teachers leading in crisis; reimagining the future"**.

We have seen this theme play out to its fullest during the last couple of months. While at a policy level the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the Provincial Education Departments provided leadership through *inter alia* guidelines, standard operating procedures and the like, it all meant very little without the leadership provided by our teachers at the coalface.

On World Teachers' Day, NAPTOSA wishes to thank and commend our members for their leadership during the current crisis. Each one, whether teacher, lecturer, office-based staff or education support personnel member, displayed his/her leadership worth in their respective areas of work. You have stood strong throughout and put the interest of the learners and students above your own.

The manner in which our teachers and lecturers adapted to the crisis was nothing short of remarkable, especially the speed with which new methods of teaching and learning were developed. It showed the wealth of untapped potential and innovation that exist within our teaching fraternity. We hope the DBE and the Department of Higher Education and Training took full cognisance of this, because it demonstrates that reimagining the future of education can no longer be achieved by departmental desktop exercises alone. To succeed, will require the harnessing of what teachers and lecturers can bring to the table through their participation and input.

While we annually celebrate World Teachers' Day, the origin of this day is often lost. Introduced for the first time in 1994 it commemorates the adoption in 1966 of the UNESCO/ILO Recommendations regarding the status of teachers. Since 1997, the day also commemorates the adoption of the Recommendations of the status of persons in higher education.

The Recommendations recognise "the essential role of teachers and lecturers in educational advancement and the importance of their contribution to the development of ...modern society" and is focussed on ensuring that they enjoy the status commensurate with this role. One of the main guiding principles of the Recommendations is that teaching should be regarded as a profession. Sadly, this is not always recognised by the education authorities and the community at large, causing the status of the profession to be on the decline globally. On the international stage, Education International is engaged in reversing this trend and locally the education departments are urged to give new impetus to the status of teachers and lecturers in order for them to take up their rightful place among the other recognised professions in our country.

One does not often hear our education departments referring to the Recommendations when celebrating World Teachers Day. Could this have something to do with the contents of the Recommendations, bearing in mind that it *inter alia* recommends the following:

- Teachers' salaries should reflect the importance to society of the teaching function and compare favourably with salaries paid in other occupations requiring similar or equivalent qualifications; and
- School buildings should be safe and school premises should be maintained so as not to compromise the health and safety of teachers and learners.

On both these counts our teachers and lecturers are being failed. The employer's decision not to implement the negotiated salary increase on 1 April 2020 is diametrically opposed to what the Recommendations propose with regard to teacher salaries. It also leaves the Minister of Basic Education's most recent statement that "the sacrifice by our teachers has been seen; and we appreciate this" sounding rather hollow.

As far as the health and safety of our teachers are concerned, these matters are not always given the priority that they deserve as was clearly demonstrated by the lengths NAPTOSA and the other recognised education trade unions had to go to, to ensure the safety of members prior to the re-opening of schools amidst the COVID situation. School infrastructure safety remains a problem, while calls by NAPTOSA for the DBE to put measures in place to provide safe working environments for our members have not yielded any tangible results.

On the positive side, the labour rights espoused by the Recommendations are enjoyed by teachers and lecturers in South Africa whereas many of their counterparts in other countries are still battling to secure even the most basic of these rights. It is therefore deplorable that the State as Employer, at this juncture, is placing our collective bargaining rights in jeopardy through their actions.

NAPTOSA and its members have, throughout this pandemic period, proved their resilience. So, whatever we may be facing, we are sure to overcome.

Enjoy World Teachers' Day and be assured how much your membership of NAPTOSA, and your contribution to the country, are valued.

BASIL MANUEL
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR