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NNF 8 of 2022 19 April 2022

KZN FLOODS: DEVASTATING IMPACT ON SCHOOLING

With the President and many other South Africans, NAPTOSA wishes to extend our deepest condolences to the families of loved ones who lost their lives in the KZN floods. We especially hold the parents, care givers, families and school communities of the nearly 60 learners and education staff members who succumbed, in our thoughts and prayers.

The floods have left devastation in its wake and education in the province has been particularly hard hit with more than 600 schools damaged, more than 100 schools inaccessible at this stage and, according to the President, 270 000 learners affected.

The fact that so many schools are unable to open after the Easter weekend without an indication as to when they will be able to return to normal schooling, means that thousands of learners will lose valuable teaching and learning time that can be ill afforded after the losses suffered during the COVID-19 lockdown measures.

We call on the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the KZN provincial education department to implement emergency plans to provide temporary classrooms, water and ablution facilities, as needed, to the damaged schools.

The death of learners and education staff members, the general devastation and the damage to schools cannot but psychologically affect learners and staff of the schools involved. The deployment of psycho-social services to these schools is therefore crucial. It is heartening to learn that the provincial education department has already put the necessary wheels in motion to provide such services.

It is lamentable and utterly frustrating that the impact of the floods on the KZN education situation is being exacerbated by the slow progress that the provincial department has been making in addressing the rain damages to schools in the province during December 2021. It is clear that the current situation is unlikely to be effectively salvaged provincially. NAPTOSA therefore welcomes the President's announcement that the provincial state of disaster has been elevated to a national state of disaster.

We appeal to the DBE and the provincial education department to do a thorough assessment of the impact on schools in the province and to work hand in hand with the relevant national and provincial departments and local authorities to ensure that schooling in the province can return to normality in the shortest possible time.

The disaster has once again firmly put the spotlight on the issue of school infrastructure. As NAPTOSA we call on DBE to develop a national plan to address poor school infrastructure. Granted, damage to schools as a result of a natural disaster cannot be prevented, but such a national school infrastructure plan should incorporate steps to address infrastructure disaster management.

We note that the Eastern Cape has also been affected by flooding. While there is currently no available information on damages to schools, the issues raised above are equally applicable to education in that province.

NAPTOSA is a caring union. We therefore make an appeal on all our members to contribute to the relief efforts by making a R 50-00 donation. With the track record we have in South Africa, it is understood that there would be skepticism on the management and application of relief funds. NAPTOSA, however, believes that as a relief organization "Gift of the Givers Foundation" has, over many years, proven that they have the integrity to do so and that our contributions should be directed to them.

Contributions can be made to any of the following accounts:

Gift of the Givers Foundation

Bank: Standard Bank

Account number: 052137228

Universal code: 051001

OR

Gift of the Givers Foundation Zakaat Account

Bank: Standard Bank

Account number: 052278611

Universal code: 051001

Apart from the general relief needed, there is also a dire need for books for learners. Our NAPTOSA: KZN office is currently making an assessment of the needs in this regard and will later put out a communique on this. It would be appreciated if members could also see their way clear to assist in this matter.

BASIL MANUEL

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR