

Speech
Day of the African Child Commemoration
Octave Wiéhé Auditorium, Tuesday 16 June 2015

A very good morning to you all!

The Day of the African Child gives us another opportunity to mobilise our efforts for the sake of children's welfare, and to promote children's human rights to a wider audience.

As per the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC), these rights are classified under four broad themes: ***Survival, Development, Protection and Participation.***

These rights enable children in practice to grow and develop in a holistic manner. These rights must therefore be safeguarded by one and all, and most particularly by the family and the State.

Background to the Day of the African Child

On 16 June 1976, thousands of black schoolchildren took to the streets in Soweto, South Africa, to protest against the inferior quality of their education and to demand their right to be taught in their own language.

Hundreds of these schoolchildren were shot down by South African Security forces. The street protests lasted over a fortnight and resulted in the death of more than a hundred people with a thousand more who suffered injuries.

In 1991, the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union) established the Day of the African Child in memory of those who lost their lives in the Soweto uprising. The Day also draws attention to the lives of African children today more generally.

Several provisions in the Convention on the Rights of the Child reflect children's right to participation. Thus, Article 12 of the CRC states that children have the right to participate in decision-making processes which may be relevant to their lives and also to have the chance to influence decisions taken in their favour within the family, the school or the community. The guiding principle of the CRC affirms that children are full-fledged persons who have the right to express their views in all matters affecting them, and requires that such views be heard and given due weight in accordance with the child's age and maturity.

It also recognises the potential of children to enrich decision-making processes, to share perspectives and to participate as citizens and actors of change. The practical meaning of children's right to participation must be considered in all matters concerning children.

The Day of the African Child presents an opportunity to focus on the work of all actors who are committed to upholding the rights of children on the continent and to support their efforts in addressing the obstacles for realising these rights.

This special Day also provides an occasion for Governments, international institutions and communities to renew their on-going commitments towards improving the plight of marginalised and vulnerable children through activities aimed at including these children.

More than just a commemoration, the Day of the African Child seeks to draw the attention of all actors involved in improving the condition of children on the African continent and to unite their efforts to combat the ills which plague the daily lives of children.

The theme chosen by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child for the Day of the African Child this year is ***25 years after the adoption of the African Children's Charter: Accelerating our collective efforts to end child marriage in Africa.***

Our local theme for this year is ***Protection zanfani, se responsabilite tou dimoun.*** This would enable us to raise awareness and increase understanding among adults and children on the protection and rights of the child.

To mark the occasion, we shall have a '16 Days 16 Rights Campaign on the Rights of child' in primary and secondary schools. This campaign will target school children in order to raise their awareness and understanding of children's rights as per the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

On Monday 8 June 2015, I visited cancer-suffering children at Victoria Hospital, Candos, and my Ministry donated books, flowers, schools materials and toys to these children and staff of this specialised hospital ward.

Today, we shall have a series of activities, here at the Octave Wiehe Auditorium.

Some of you have had the chance to see a photo exhibition which chronicles the Soweto uprising. This exhibition has benefited from the collaboration of the Nelson Mandela Centre for African Culture, the South African High Commission in Mauritius and the University of Mauritius.

We shall also launch a booklet on the UN Convention of the Convention on the Rights of the Child in English and in Kreol. The

aim of this booklet is to inform students and children about their rights and to guide them and their parents and other stakeholders.

We are honoured and delighted to have with us today Dr Nomvuyo Nontsikelelo Nokwe, High Commissioner of the Republic of South Africa. Dr Nokwe will deliver a Memorial Lecture on the Soweto uprising, which will then be followed by an interactive discussion between students and a panel of experts on the ***Rights and Responsibilities of Children***.

Some 500 Students of Form IV and Lower Six from different schools will participate in this interactive session. I shall be part of this panel which will also include Dr Nokwe, a historian and a sociologist from the University of Mauritius, the Head of the CDU as well as a psychologist from the CDU.

Let me also inform you that on 21 June 2015, a Creativity Workshop will be organised at the Mahébourg Creativity Centre. This will target some 200 children living in the vicinity of Mahébourg. The objective of the Workshop is to create a platform for children to express themselves, to develop their talents and creativity skills.

Have a nice day!