

Youth want govt to consider their views

Young people attending the second annual Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament have appealed to government to take their views into account when developing policy and programmes that affect them.



(Image: GCIS)

In one voice, the young people told Women, Children and People with Disabilities Minister Lulu Xingwana that "government must take our views into account when they develop policies and programmes because we are future leaders of this nation. We have better ideas of how government can improve our lives for the better. Nothing must be decided about us without our involvement."

The Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament took place in Mpumalanga on Saturday.

The future leaders also challenged government to make sure that all children have access to quality and decent education. They also told government to intervene and stop cultural practices such as ukuthwala - where young girls are forced into marriage with older men - as this amounted to rape and sexual abuse.

They also demanded that government take serious measures to ensure the safety of children. The issue of the abduction and mutilation of children and poverty was also raised. Government was also urged to invest in child health and development.

In responding to the raised issues, Xingwana made a commitment that their recommendations would be treated as a priority.

She said government would own up to the issues they had raised, adding that all government departments would continue to strengthen their working relationships to ensure that government achieved the desired level and quality of services for children, including good quality education and safer schools.

The department was in the process of reviewing the National Plan of Action for Children, and the Children's Parliament is

part of soliciting views of children during the drafting of the National Plan of Action for Children.

According to the minister, the Nelson Mandela Children's Parliament was about providing a platform for children to be heard. The event is held in partnership between the department, the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, the Mpumalanga Provincial Government and the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature.

"Together with the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund, we committed ourselves to the principle of holding those in authority accountable. You correctly demand accountability, not only from government, but from parents, caregivers, community, civil society and other sectors of society," said Xingwana.

The minister added her own concern about the safety and security of children. "One of the greatest challenges facing our country is the scourge of violence against children. Far too many of our children are being attacked, raped and killed," she said.

The annual SAPS crime statistics indicate an increase in cases of attempted murder, murder and sexual offences against children between 2009 and 2010.

"There has been an increase in crimes that involve violence and brutality towards children. You correctly remind us to take steps to ensure your safety and security," said Xingwana.

However, she challenged the youth to read and learn about the journey of Nelson Mandela's life and his contribution in building a democratic and free South Africa.

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