TOWARDS A GOOD MORAL REPORT

BY SENZO MCHUNU

Recently we observed with great interest the developments around the banning and the eventual unbanning by the Film & Publications Board of the film, *Of Good Report*.

As people who come from the past such as ours, it was hardly surprising why the banning of this film received so much attention and widespread condemnation from the South African society. Our past makes it difficult for us not to react negatively when there is a ban of what is seen by many as a creative work of art intended to paint a picture of a society. As tempting as it is, one would not want to delve into a debate as to whether the banning of the film was warranted.

For us in the education sector, this film is important in that it highlights the issue of improper relations between teachers and those whom they are supposed to impart knowledge to. Beyond the controversy that this film has invited, it talks to the whole issue of moral degeneration and the urgent need for regeneration and revival of the moral fibre of our society. The issue of moral regeneration and fighting social ills, is the issue that the African National Congress has also decided to focus on more so now than before. As a leader of society, the ANC realises that the issue of moral regeneration is at the core of our nation building programme.

In our schools, the issue of unsavoury relations between teachers and learners still sticks out like a sore thumb. I say this, notwithstanding the fact that the majority of our teachers are responsible people who take the education of our children very seriously. A study by advocacy group, Human Rights Watch reported in 2001 that, “For many South African girls, violence and abuse are an inevitable part of the school environment.” This same study found that educators frequently misuse their authority and positions of trust to sexually abuse girls. We need to ponder, muse and reflect intently on these findings, especially since this
is a Month where we celebrate our women and girl children in South Africa.

One of the responsibilities of teachers in any society is to help mould the character of the young people entrusted to them. It is to build a total human being in terms of values, morality and personality of our children, thus producing law abiding and responsible citizens.

This anomaly of adults taking advantage of children is not only confined to our schools, the problem of “sugar daddies” in our society is one social ill that we need to oppose with our lives. When we talked to learners during the social ills conference that we had early this year, young boys protested that that they are not the ones responsible for high numbers of learner pregnancy. “It is those with money that we don’t have who impregnate most of the girls in our schools,” they asserted.

In the province of KwaZulu-Natal alone, in 2010 we had 13 725 learners who fell pregnant and in 2012 we had 10 595 learners who fell pregnant. Although 2011 figures shows a steady decline, 10 595 learners falling pregnant is still too astounding a number. These figures are disturbing, but the context is even more overwhelming. The overwhelming context is that there is likelihood that more than half of these children may have contracted HIV and/or other sexually transmitted infections.

If the film Of Good Report is going to help open our eyes to these startling realities, then its subsequent unbanning was a sound decision. According to the Youth Risk Behaviour (YRBS), nationally: 41.1% of learners in Grade 8 to 11 reported having had sex, 14.4% of learners had their first sexual encounter at age 13 or younger and 54.0% of learners had more than one sexual partner. We need to be in a war mode and it will take nothing short of a revolution to reverse this trend.

Speaking to students in one of the tertiary institutions recently, I remarked about a danger of alcohol abuse. South Africa has significantly high prevalence of substance abuse with alcohol being the most commonly used substance. The You Decide Campaign of 2012 found that:

- 50% of teenagers in the average SA home are users of alcohol,
• 15% of boys and 8% of girls have had their first drink before age 13,
• People who start drinking before age 15 are four times more likely to develop alcohol dependence,
• Teenagers who use alcohol are three times more likely to be involved in violent crimes,
• 60% of Grades 8 to 11 learners who abused alcohol had to repeat their grades.

While the Department of Education in KwaZulu-Natal has My Life My Future Campaign and the Department of Health has the Sugar Daddies campaign, fighting social ills needs more than isolated campaigns from individual Departments. As a society we need to institutionalise our fight against social ills. Improving the social conditions of our people can never be realised fully if we allow these maladies to eat off the moral and social fibre of this society that we sacrifices so much building.

Our young people are not the proverbial “lost generation” as many have been made to believe. Like any other generation, they have their own peculiar challenges. We need to help them find meaning, assist them in finding their historic mission and continuously remind them that people like the former President Nelson Mandela suffered as they did so that they can enjoy the fruits of our hard earned freedom.

Overcoming these persistent social ills will be a fitting honour to young people like Solomon Mahlangu, who instead of enjoying their youth, decided to lay down their lives in order to “water the tree of freedom.” If that can be achieved, the story of our moral and social fibre will be of a very good report.