

**Speech by the MEC for Education in KwaZulu-Natal, Kwazi Mshengu, on the occasion of the Congress of South African Student (COSAS) Congress, Coastlands Hotel, 16 July 2022**

Salutations

Revolutionary greetings Comrades

It is indeed a great pleasure for me to be standing before you today on this very important occasion of your provincial congress.

This congress is important because if young people, especially young revolutionaries, are to play a significant role in shaping the future of their country, they need to be formally structured and organised in order to craft their own vision and carefully design tactics that will take them to the future they envision.

Since time immemorial, young people in the different parts of our continent, have been the midwives, and in a sense, a conduit through which many revolutions that shaped our continent as we know it, came through.

It is our very own Steve Bantu Biko, who in 1968, formed the South African Student Congress (SASO), the student movement that motivated young people to pursue an exclusive black identity and take pride in who they are as Africans.

Your organisation, COSAS, was formed only two years after the young people of 1976 showed not only the continent, but the entire globe, what the collective energy, youthful exuberance and bravery of young people can achieve.

In a manner of speaking comrades, It is not only the victories of the young people of 1976, but also their death, that gave birth to COSAS as we know it today.

Comrades, we would only be celebrating your gathering here today, if it did not come at the time when our country is facing a myriad of socio-economic challenges. As things are comrades, there is very little to celebrate and cheer about. Today, more than ever before, young people are called on to provide visionary leadership and proffer solutions to many of the challenges that our country is facing.

You owe it to the first President of COSAS, Comrade Ephraim Mogale and many other leaders of COSAS (including the recently departed, Songezo Mjongile), to

ensure that as the current generation, you live up to the challenges that our movement, the African National Congress and our country in general are facing.

You owe it to the Honorary Lifetime President of COSAS, Comrade Winnie Madikizela Mandela, to ensure that our young people, especially the children of the working class, dare not fail in this their generational mission, of rising above the challenges that our country and our movement are facing.

As I speak before you today in the month, which we have dubbed the Mandela Month in South Africa, I am reminded of the words that Nelson Mandela spoke during the COSAS National Congress held in December 1995.

On that important event, Madiba said, ***“It is refreshing for me to brush shoulders with the young lions of a democratic South Africa. Your organisation earned its proud reputation in the crucible of the struggle. Yours is not the association of arm-chair critics. From the day of its formation the Congress of South African Student demonstrated that it practices what it preaches.”***

Comrades, examples and famous quotes abound of how passionate and intentional Nelson Mandela was about education. As we commemorate him in this Month of July, let us recommit to take our education and the education of all young black people, seriously.

As an organisation that organises in the basic education sector Comrades, you have a central and a significant role to play in addressing the triple challenges of poverty inequality and unemployment.

Much as we today call upon you to assist us in our current nationwide challenges, we ask of you to start by excelling in the area of basic education. You can do this comrades by ensuring that every learner who is a member of COSAS leads by example by ensuring that they commit to their studies and work hard to extricate not only themselves, but their families out of the shackles of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

In the midst of the kind of degeneration and the moral decay that we unfortunately witness in our country, you need to come up with creative and appealing campaigns that will make education not only attractive, but also fashionable.

You need to spiritedly organise and campaign so much so that it gets commonly regarded as backwards, for any young person and especially those from disadvantaged background, to shy away from education.

Comrades, I dare say, if you are to get the recognition that you deserve as a student formation, you need to ensure that you excel in your immediate area of basic education.

What this also means Comrades, is that you need to encourage your fellow comrades to focus on the learning areas that are needed to address the current economical challenges of the country.

Our young people need to be equipped with the skills for the future in order to occupy the space and remain relevant, with a view of not only creating, but living comfortably in the South Africa of our dreams.

The problem of alcohol in general and underage drinking in particular, is one of the causes that you need to champion as a formation of young people. The 21 young people that we recently lost at Enyobeni Tavern in the Eastern Cape, were young people who were supposed to be having an insatiable appetite for education and knowledge acquisition; as opposed to be having an insatiable appetite for entertainment culture and all the escapism that come with it.

In a country where glitz, glamour and celebrity culture have become some kind of an idol for our young people, as the leadership of COSAS, you need to break from the norm and encourage a culture of knowledge acquisition and knowledge production, with education and extensive reading, occupying the centre stage.

There is no country comrades and has been led successfully by celebrities. I have nothing against celebrities and we respect their space and their role as entertainers, creatives and athletes, but if we are to lead the country and face our current challenges head on, we need much more than the celebrity culture.

Comrades, the report by the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) says that racism continues to plague the nation, with complaints of discrimination, especially hate speech, among the most common recorded by the SAHRC. This unfortunate findings were part of the SAHRC's latest trend analysis report for the 2020/2021 released this last Wednesday, 13 July 2022.

Comrades this means that the fight against racism is a fight that you especially, have to fight to win. The disturbing findings on the allegations of racism and financial irregularities at Grosvnor Girls High School, means that we need to intensify the war against racism.

It also means that you don't need to shy away from forming structures and organising in the former Model C schools because that is where cases of racism are rife.

Non-racialism is one of the values of COSAS and you need to fight tooth and nail to rid our country and our education system of such abhorrent and backward tendencies by some among us.

When it comes to Grosvenor Girls High School saga Comrades, we are going to do all that has to be done to liberate that institution from all the vestiges of the past.

When you have achieved all of these immediate tasks Comrades, we will call on you to take part in the challenges that are faced by our movement, the ANC. As the next layer of leadership, we call on all of you to frown upon any appearance of corruption and factionalism.

Factionalism, personality cult, dispensing of patronage and corruption, are some of the things that are slowly eating at the very essence of our movement, and we trust you, as you get to the structures of the mother body, to come with the new ethos and envision the ANC that our forebears lived and died for.

Comrades I wish you all of the best in all your deliberations

The future belongs to you

**I THANK YOU**