

Youth Day 2023 – Drawing from the bravery and strength of those before us!



Today we commemorate the 47-year anniversary of the Soweto Uprising. As we reflect on the battles fought by those before us, we remain mindful of the ongoing battles faced by our young people today.

On 16 June 1976, students gathered to protest the new law that placed Afrikaans as a compulsory language of instruction in all schools situated in black townships. This was a continuation of the dissatisfaction with the Bantu Education system that was rooted in inequality and racial segregation. An education system further characterised by poorly trained educators, overcrowded classrooms, insufficient resources and inadequate facilities. The Bantu Education system was one of the

many discriminatory and unjust products of the Apartheid regime.

Students protested based on their simple desire to be taught in their own language. A desire to receive a meaningful learning experience, and not be unfairly excluded or disadvantaged by the education system. There was a desire to have access to an education system made to assist in the advancement of all young persons, so that they too may reach their full potential. A desire that many young people still have today. The peaceful protest went awry, when students were met by violence from law enforcement. Many innocent, young lives were wrongfully lost.

The Soweto Uprising was an event which encouraged others to take a stand, and sparked further protests against the discriminatory and unjust policies of the Apartheid government. It is as a result of the bravery shown and sacrifices made by those before us, that we can experience and enjoy the new democratic regime, and all the rights and freedoms afforded to us by the Constitution.

Today we remember the lives lost, and celebrate the eagerness to learn and bravery shown by our young people in the fight against injustice.

Today we celebrate all youth. As we celebrate, we remain mindful that basic human rights still go unprotected and unrecognised. There are many young persons from disadvantaged groups whose rights and freedoms need to be acknowledged and fought for. Children and youth with intellectual disability are merely one example of such groups. Children and youth with intellectual disability are denied their right to basic education due to an education system that excludes them from receiving admission and placement into public schools that are equipped to provide for their different learning and support needs. This is a violation of their human rights.

As the WCFID, today we choose to not only learn from the Soweto Uprising, but also to draw from the strength shown by those before us. We continue to advocate and fight for the rights and freedoms of persons with intellectual disability, for the recognition and enforcement of the right to education of children with intellectual disability, and for the improvement of their quality of life.

We are all human, and deserving of the rights and freedoms guaranteed to us by our Constitution.

Today we hope that you too take the time to reflect, and choose to draw from the strength, drive and bravery of those before us in the fight against injustice.

