

**REMARKS ON THE OBJECTIVES OF THE FORUM
BY MRS. RACHEL KACHAJE,
CHAIRPERSON OF SOUTHERN AFRICA FEDERATION OF THE DISABLED
(SAFOD)**

**AT THE SOUTHERN AFRICA DISABILITY ROUNDTABLE FORUM
20-23 JUNE 2017, HOLIDAY INN, JOHANNESBURG, SOUTH AFRICA**

- 1. Our Guest Honour, Ms Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, MP,
Deputy Minister of Social Development, South Africa**

- 2. Mr. Mzolisi ka Toni
Deputy Director General: Rights of Persons with Disabilities
Department of Social Development (DSD), South Africa**

- 3. Ms. Lilly Ann Elvestad, Secretary General of the Norwegian
Federation of Organisations of Disabled People (FFO)**

- 4. Mr. Mussa Chiwaula,
Director General of the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled
(SAFOD)**

- 5. Mr. Dan Rekane,
The Gauteng Provincial Chairperson for Disabled People South Africa
(DPSA)**

- 6. Distinguished Guests**

- 7. Ladies and Gentlemen**

Honorable Deputy Minister, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, on behalf of the Regional Executive Council of the Southern Africa Federation of the Disabled (SAFOD), its Secretariat, and the entire membership, I would like to welcome you to this auspicious event, the Southern Africa Round Table Forum, which is being held here at the Holiday Inn Airport.

Today is a big day. One of those rare and/or special days when Disabled Peoples Organizations (DPOs), Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), academia, independent researchers, Government representatives, the private sector and other key sectors, are interacting among themselves over a very critical issue of disability rights and mainstreaming. Indeed today is the day when we can demonstrate our unflinching commitment towards the persons with disabilities.

And because it is one of those rare undertakings, the theme for this event is befittingly entitled, *“Reflecting on 30 years of Disability Advocacy & Activism in Southern Africa”*.

So as can be seen from the theme, this event gives us the opportunity to reflect on where we are coming from over the past 30 years, where we have gone wrong, what we would have done better, and how we should move forward.

This is the opportunity where participants are encouraged to express themselves as much as possible, so that together we chart a way forward in terms of how we are going to best confront many issues affecting persons with disabilities in the region. I know that just like myself, you have many issues to raise and brilliant ideas to unveil. Such approach will be a key factor to the success of this forum.

Honorable Deputy Minister, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, for so long, the persons with disabilities in this region have been

pushed to the periphery. For a long time, they have felt neglected and I know some have even wondered whether we, DPOs, have their interest at heart. This forum offers a moment to renew our commitment to addressing these issues and concerns.

Yes, we have legal frameworks such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD), the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the African Union Continental Plan of Action for the African Decade of Persons with Disabilities (2010 – 2019), and other such instruments and frameworks. But the question is, to what extent have all these made a positive difference in the lives of persons with disabilities in the region? Your guess is as good as mine! Hence it is now time that we need to begin seriously interrogating these issues if anything meaningful is to change substantially

Honorable Deputy Minister, Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen, it is therefore in this context that SAFOD and its core partners are seeking for innovative ways to promote human rights and development of persons with disabilities and we believe that this forum will help all us not only to move towards the realization of these rights, but also elevating these issues to become part of regional development goals of SADC. SAFOD, being the leading Southern African disability-focused NGO engaged in coordination of activities of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities, is determined to play its part in bringing this disability agenda at SADC level out of the cocoon.

In addition, at SAFOD we intend to continue coordinating more research on an issue that is characterized by very few indigenous studies, with little literature available. For instance, we need to further investigate the perceptions of Intellectual Disability in African contexts, access to education and health care, the provision of appropriate rehabilitation support or services, just to mention a few.

During the forum, participants will also get to learn that to achieve inclusive development within SADC and its Member States, SAFOD has embarked on a campaign for the adoption of a SADC Protocol on the rights of persons with disabilities that will guide policy makers and policy implementers, at both national and SADC levels, on how best they can effectively mainstream disability within their national and regional development agendas. SAFOD believes that there is urgent need to ensure that all SADC countries have ratified the UNCRPD and its Optional Protocol, and also, most significantly, that the UNCRPD is well domesticated in the various statutes and pieces of legislations and policies. This should be followed by effective enforcement.

On the other hand, we also recognize that the Southern African region has its own cultural, social, economic and political contexts that need to be comprehensively taken into account when implementing the UNCRPD. The Convention on its own cannot tackle the regional context without taking into consideration its specific socio-economic distinctiveness as a region; hence the need to develop and adopt a specific Regional Protocol on Disability. I therefore implore upon you all to join this regional initiative.

But before I conclude, I would like to thank the financial and moral support we have received from our long-time partner, the FFO, who have sponsored this event. Indeed, without their financial support, this event would not have been possible.

In addition, I would also like to acknowledge the financial and technical support from African Disability Forum (ADF), where I also sit as its Secretary. Indeed this event has been collaborative undertaking between SAFOD and ADF, as it is going to be followed by an ADF Strategic Planning Workshop for SAFOD members, taking place on the 24th of this month. As most of you may be aware, SAFOD is a

regional affiliate of ADF. Interestingly, both organizations have over the past three years undergone some sort of rebirth and birth, respectively. So this collaboration is just one of the manifestations of the brighter things to come as far as disability mainstreaming is concerned here in Southern Africa and across the continent.

I also acknowledge financial and moral support that we have received from our friends in South Africa, the South Africa Employers for Disability (SAE4D) who have contributed significantly towards the gala dinner that we are hosting on Friday.

Most importantly, I also do not take for granted the goodwill and support that we have received from the Government of South Africa, through the Department of Social Development (DSD). It is our hope and prayer that the presence here today of the Deputy Minister, Ms. Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu, MP, does not only underline her Government's commitment towards disability issues in South Africa, but also sets the tone upon which all other Governments in the region can emulate.

Finally, I would like to most sincerely thank all those who worked tirelessly in planning and putting into reality this important forum. In particular, I am referring to the critically under-staffed Secretariat team led by the Director General, Mr. Mussa Chiwaula. My heart goes to you, and I salute you all.

Thank you for your attention and may GOD Bless you all!

MRS. RACHEL KACHAJE

CHAIRPERSON

SOUTHERN AFRICA FEDERATION OF THE DISABLED (SAFOD)