20 November 2019

Mr D. Makhura

Premier: Gauteng Province

Office of the Premier

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Dear Mr Makhura

**DISMISSAL OF MR PANYAZA LESUFI AS MEC OF EDUCATION IN GAUTENG**

The civil rights organisation AfriForum would like to express its deep concern over Mr Panyaza Lesufi, MEC of Education in Gauteng, in terms of his mismanagement of the online registration system and placement procedure for grade 1 and grade 8 learners for the 2020 school year.

The ongoing struggle for placements affects children, parents and schools all over Gauteng, with more than 300 000 children who have not yet received any notice of placement in schools for 2020. Moreover, AfriForum received numerous complaints from parents over the placement of their children for 2020, despite the fact that these parents had followed the registration process to a tee. These complaints include, among other, that children were placed in schools which:

* Had not been one of their choices;
* Are different from where their siblings are going to school;
* Are not closest to their home or parents’ work address; and
* Are different from where they attended grade R.

It is also true that the Gauteng Department of Education (GDE) admitted that they had sent out two wrong SMSs to order parents to attend placement meetings at the GDE’s offices in Johannesburg on a Monday (12 August 2019) and again on Sunday (3 November 2019). However, at both these meetings nobody from the GDE was available to receive the parents and attend to their complaints. To add insult to injury, these parents were not even compensated for their time or travel expenses. A simple apology does not make up for the discomfort that they suffered or the emotional upheaval that the GDE’s actions caused.

You will agree that this treatment is unacceptable.

AfriForum foresaw these problems in May 2019 already, but despite numerous letters of concern to the office of the MEC, the organisation received reaction from neither the MEC, nor his office. The actions of Lesufi and his whole team are unacceptable and only one of many reasons why he should be dismissed.

Similar problems plagued the online placement system in 2018, but AfriForum was assured that all glitches would be ironed out by 2019. This has not been the case – in fact, there are more problems now than in 2018.

In addition, the MEC’s constant attacks on schools that offer Afrikaans single-medium instruction – an internationally-recognised language right and a right that is also enshrined in the South African Constitution – polarises South African communities to the detriment of social cohesion. There are many examples in this regard. Mr Lesufi usually recants after such attacks by mentioning that his own children attended an Afrikaans school and that he does not hate the language but is committed to mother-tongue education. However, he will not allow Afrikaans schools as he 1) cannot distinguish between race and language, and 2) refuses to acknowledge that Afrikaans is not an exclusively white language, nor that Afrikaans schools admit non-white learners.

However, our complaints are not limited to schools. In 2018, Mr Lesufi accused a nursery school in Centurion of racism after he had seen a photograph of a child sitting alone during a break. Without ascertaining the facts, he not only jumped to the conclusion that this had been a racist incident, but twittered accusations against the nursery school to his more than 26 000 followers. He also shared the address of the school as well as photos in which children could clearly be identified. This resulted in threats against the school and pupils, as well a protest at the gate of the premises where the nursery school is situated. The subsequent trauma for the educators, parents and children was severe; yet, Mr Lesufi apologised neither for his misrepresentation of the facts, nor for exposing those involved to threats.

More recently in September 2019, a media report on the Solidarity Movement’s construction of a new campus for its existing training facility, Sol-Tech, sparked an uninformed, racist attack by Mr Lesufi, once again on Twitter. The medium of instruction at this facility – which complies with all registration requirements and has been teaching students of all races for twelve years already – is Afrikaans. The choice for this medium of instruction is in line with the South African Constitution’s guarantee of access to education in the student’s language of preference. Despite the Constitution’s clear explanation, tweets by Mr Lesufi included:

*I just hate racism when I see one! A race based* [sic] *institution in a non racial* [sic] *society won’t succeed. Please don’t remind us about apartheid*

*It’s not innocent unfortunately. They are angry because RAU, Tukkies, Stellenbosch University, etc are now accommodating other races and languages. We can’t go back to RAUs whether private or public, non racialism* [sic] *is the future. Let’s defend it!*

He even went on to describe the institution, which he erroneously called a university, as a “disgrace to the Constitution” – which, ironically, is a disgrace in itself.

The MEC also misrepresents facts in public:

* In a radio interview on Radio 702 on 16 August 2019 he declared that all language policies had become null and void in the country’s schools. The issue was addressed by the DA in a question to the Minister of Basic Education in Parliament on 11 September 2019, to which the Minister responded: “The language policies of schools in the Republic are not hitherto null and void as their development and review should be informed by the periodic review of departmental policies. The development and periodic review of departmental language policies including the Language in Education Policy are informed by provisions such as the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, as well as the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996.”
* He often claims to have changed the name of Hoërskool Hendrik Verwoerd to Rietondale High School, while this process is not the jurisdiction of an MEC and was instituted by the parent community of the school. He therefore claims credit that should go to the community and misrepresents the manner in which the name changes of schools should be handled, thereby misinforming other school communities who would like to embark on such a process.

Adv. Gerrie Nel, Head of AfriForum’s Private Prosecution Unit, was briefed by the Governing Body of the Eldoradopark Secondary School to take steps to address the MEC and Department of Education’s selective disciplinary action, as well as their lack of commitment to address the ongoing concern of absconding teachers at this school.

The conduct of the MEC and the Department can only be described as dancing to the tune of the South African Democratic Teachers Association and ignoring the rights and legitimate concerns of learners, parents and the governing body.

It is clear that Mr Lesufi`s focus is neither on education nor on improving the struggling schools in Gauteng. He is too busy playing politics while he should be uplifting poor-performing schools. The latest example of this was during the recent Rugby World Cup, when Mr Lesufi accused supporters who had attended the Wales match of being racist because they had the old South African Flag draped around their shoulders. It was later established that the supporters were actually wearing the current South African flag. This is but one example among many that Mr Lesufi is more focused on unearthing racist incidents rather than on improving schools and education.

AfriForum also laid criminal charges of misappropriation at the Johannesburg Central police station against Mr Lesufi’s Department. This follows the Auditor-General’s 2017/2018 report, which states that the Gauteng Department of Education spent more than R900 million on irregular expenses. When previous financial years are taken into consideration, the Department is guilty of irregular expenses to the amount of more than R2 billion.

The complaints were laid against Mr Edward Mosuwe, Head of the Department. As Accounting Officer of the Department, the law requires Mosuwe to be charged.

The Auditor-General’s report also made the following damning observations that relate to the Department:

* There were significant internal control shortcomings.
* Management did not compile regular, accurate and complete financial and performance reports.
* Management did not review and monitor compliance with applicable legislation and regulations.
* No effective measures were taken to prevent the incurrence of irregular expenses.
* The accounting officer did not effectively oversee the preparation of financial statements, performance information and compliance with legislation and regulations.
* The financial statement submitted by the Department did not comply with prescriptive legislation.

It is unacceptable for a Department – which should be focusing on educating the youth of our country – to misappropriate such vast sums of money. Mr Lesufi should explain why his Department is, according to the Auditor-General, guilty of misappropriating money that was earmarked to educate children.

Not only taxpayers are falling victim to the Department’s misappropriation, but also the children who should have benefitted from the correct appropriation of these wasted funds. It is time that government officials were brought to book for misappropriating funds. Taxpayers’ money is not a bottomless pit and loyal taxpayers have had it for the government’s attitude of wastefulness and irresponsibility.

In light of all of the above, AfriForum requests that the MEC should be removed from his position and replaced by a person who places quality education, the welfare of learners, positive support for school governing bodies, the increased functionality of existing schools and the building of more schools first, instead of ideological considerations. The youth of Gauteng cannot be allowed to suffer because of one man’s political game.

AfriForum is looking forward to your response at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely

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