

5th June, 2003

## **Botswana Federation of Secondary School Teachers (BOFESETE)**

### Message to mark The Botswana Teachers Day

The National Executive Committee of BOFESETE takes this opportunity of Botswana Teachers Day to salute the men and women who have toiled for so long and so hard to make this country what it is today. Teachers are the unsung heroes and heroines of the development of this nation and it is benefiting to give due recognition to the veterans of this struggle by means of awards on this glorious day. Botswana Teachers Day is a result of initiatives by EDUCATION International and UNESCO in 1994 to raise the profile of teachers by setting aside a day to recognize and appreciate the enormous contribution made by teachers to national development. BOFESETE is grateful that the Government of Botswana saw it fit to introduce this day in the calendar of Botswana in line with the Botswana Honors Act. This is a milestone in the development of the education system of Botswana.

Teachers Day is a very important day in the educational calendar of Botswana since it is the time for teachers to reflect on their profession. This is not just a day to celebrate but it is a time to pause and pontificate and deliberate on the meaning of the day. There is a general tendency to emphasize a lot on celebratory and merrymaking aspect of the day. While BOFESETE welcomes celebrations as an important method to mark the Day we feel that too much emphasize on celebration has the danger of distracting from important issues of substance that should be addressed on this day. There is a risk that the meaning of the day could be lost in the process of merrymaking and feasting that customarily accompany the events of this nature. There are a lot of good speeches and statements that are presented on the day at different localities by many invited guests. While this is good and welcome, what is troubling is that in some places there is often an absence of a teachers voice in the programme. Sometimes teachers are relegated to the role of giving a vote of thanks. Teachers through their organizations should be at the forefront of the proceedings. This is regrettable because the day IS FOR TEACHERS AND BY TEACHERS. Teachers can not be left out of their celebrations.

BOFESETE calls upon all Regional and Local committees that organize Teachers Day to come up with imaginative and interesting ways to celebrate Teachers Day. Most Teachers Day programs are monotonous and predictable. BOFESETE would like to see programs that include discussions on of education by teachers themselves and other stake holders. Teachers should be encouraged and invited to participate in panel discussions, present papers and other intellectually stimulating methods, rather than just rely on dry one way speeches which have come to characterize the day. Teachers Day should be made more meaningful and relevant to its intended targets. Perhaps this accounts for the apparent lack of interest in teachers day by some teachers. Teachers should be more involved in the planning of the day.

This years Teachers Day comes at a time when teachers through out the country are waiting with baited breath for a new pay dispensation in terms of the Tsa Badiri Consultancy which

recommended a new pay structure for teachers and other cadres. The regrettable thing is that all we hear is a deafening silence from the authorities, yet this is something that was agreed to over a year ago. The Ministry of Education is very poor and stingy with communication and releasing information be it good news or bad news. The Minister of Education must appoint, as a matter of urgency, a media liaison officer to communicate with the interested parties regarding issues of concern. It is regrettable that even Teachers Organization that were involved in the process of Parallel Progression still do not know anything about the fate of the report on Parallel Progression. As it is now one is not sure what is going to happen with Parallel Progression vis a vis the Tsa Badiri consultancy report. There is a very real danger that teachers may find themselves in a messy situation reminiscent of the Parallel Progression when it was introduced. There are many teachers who are not progressing at the moment because of suspension of Parallel Progression. Some Teachers are still suffering from the effects of that badly implemented policy. We call upon the Minister for Education to improve the manpower management the Ministry of Education because it is often found wanting when it comes to delivery of Human Resource Management of Teachers.

The Government has a tendency of introducing policies that are not well thought out, only for them to be withdrawn at short notice, examples that come to mind are scarce skills, parallel progression, working hours, leave encashment and many other examples. This does not give a good impression of the policy makers.

One can only hope that this time around teachers would not be disadvantaged and will get all their financial benefits in the form of back pays because government had accepted that the new pay structure should be in place by April.

BOFESETE has noted with interest that members of the Botswana Defence Force seem to get their matters expedited without undue delay. While we are still waiting for Parallel Progression and the Tsa Badiri salary dispensations, soldiers are already enjoying the benefits of Tsa Badiri recommendations for them. Are we not working for the same Government of the Republic of Botswana or some public servants are more important than others?

This years theme of Teachers Day says that "The teacher an agent of change for a healthy, tolerant and morally upright nation" This theme captures the role of teachers very well. It is indeed true that teachers are agents of change in matters like health and morality. Teachers impart the values and mores of a society to the children. The multidimensional role of teachers dictates that their reward system should reflect this nature of their work.

During World Teachers Day of last year, Education International (the mother of all teacher unions), had this to say about teachers "in a world that faces daunting challenges that are more complex than ever, quality education remains the fundamental means of meeting the challenges. Quality education is the ultimate tool for preserving democracy, combating poverty, eradicating racism and xenophobia and stopping the spread of HIV/AIDS." This captured the essence of work of teachers very well. Last year the World Teachers day motto was "Quality Teachers for Quality Education" Botswana Teachers Day theme is very pertinent to the challenges that this country faces. The constitutional debates that are currently raging around the country have a bearing on education and teachers can play a positive role in helping to resolve the issues.

It is well accepted that the most serious challenge facing this country and many in Southern Africa is the battle against HIV/ AIDS. Teachers are by their very nature of their work the foot soldiers in the battle against HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is not a disease that needs drugs, doctors, nurses but all that is required is education and teachers. Just the knowledge that people must, abstain from casual sex, test for the virus, use safe sex etc is all that is needed to defeat the virus. All these are attitudes that should be taught at school by teachers. By the time nurses and doctors come into the picture it will already be too late because the disease is incurable. AIDS is a disease of knowledge and attitudes. Those with the right knowledge and attitude survive and while those without correct knowledge and have wrong attitude will survive. Knowledge is no longer just a source of power but it is a matter of survival, and teachers empower society with knowledge. BOFESETE is not downplaying the role of doctors and nurses all we are saying the disease is incurable and the only method is prevention and that can best be done through education by teachers.

The government has done commendable work in providing educational infrastructure like the schools, teachers' houses and other facilities for education. This is an enviable achievement by all standards. Access to basic education is a reality for the vast majority of Batswana children except for a small percent of children in difficult circumstances. The greatest challenge that now faces the Ministry of Education is to improve the quality of education in the country. This will be a bigger challenge because the problem cannot be solved by money alone. It needs the involvement of teachers in strategic planning for this. The government will first have to provide quality teachers for this to be a reality. Quality teachers involve attraction, training, retention, motivating and the best candidates from senior secondary schools and not just people who could not be admitted in other professions. One hopes that the program of Performance Management System will result in qualitative improvement in education as it cascades to schools.

It is pleasing to note that the country has made tremendous strides in the training of teachers to the extent that the country now has an oversupply of trained teachers in many subject areas. This should be a commendable achievement for which the nation should be proud of.

What is disturbing is that the distribution of the surplus teachers is skewed such that urban areas have an oversupply while the remote areas still use untrained teachers (so called temporary teachers). This is scandalous! While Teaching Service Management is responsible for this unbalanced distribution of teachers in the country, teachers are also responsible for this state of affairs because many people refuse out rightly to serve in the so-called remote areas. Many collaborate with their doctors to fabricate fictitious diseases that can only be attended to in the urban areas. Teaching Service Management should assess these bogus medical requests for transfers. It is the duty of each and every teacher to serve anywhere in the country. Students in the remote areas need quality teachers more than any other students in the country. If this state of affairs is not attended to it will have very serious implications in that only qualified and trained people will come from around the major settlements while the remote villages will only produce laborers simply because teachers refused to serve in those parts of the country. Education is a scarce resource that must distributed evenly around the country. Teaching Service Management has recently developed a transfer policy that should hopefully redress the balance between the interests of individuals and the needs of the country.

BOFESETE calls upon TSM to use the excess supply of teachers in a manner designed to improve the quality of education. We think it is now time to reduce the class size for both primary, junior and senior secondary schools. The class size is an important variable that can improve the quality of education. Private schools rely a lot on the advantage of a smaller class size. Rather than retrench expatriates TSM should strive for a smaller class size, given that other Batswana have to be taken for studies and there is the impact of HIV/AIDS. Class sizes of around 45 pupils are not conducive to quality education.

The work of a teacher is very crucial in the development of a child. A teacher usually has a long lasting impression on the mind of a learner. UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and ILO have captured the role of teachers succinctly when they said that "Learning is not an impersonal process but occurs largely through regular, direct interaction between learners and their teachers as well as by means of teachers facilitating learning. Good teachers guide learners in the process of understanding the enormous amount of accumulated knowledge available today, using it constructively, and communicating it effectively. These are serious responsibilities which can only be fulfilled by dedicated professionals who have received specialized training." This effectively debunks the myth that teaching is not a profession. Teaching is a serious profession that deals with children. Children are very sensitive people who have to be handled with extreme care otherwise they will develop into deviants. Quality teachers are invaluable to any education system. Like other professionals, good teachers do not come cheap. They have to be paid commensurately with the value of their skills to society just like their counterparts in other professions like accountancy, law, medicines and others. BOFESETE hopes that the expected new pay structure will reflect this in remunerating teachers. BOFESETE advocates for the introduction of professional allowance for teachers to reflect the immensity and value of their work.

The level of information and communications technology skills among teachers concerns BOFESETE. The Ministry of Education's policy on ICT is unknown to teachers. There appears to be no concerted plan to familiarize teachers with ICT. What is happening is that computer labs are being equipped with computers but many teachers are still not up to scratch with ICT skills. There are many teachers who still cannot do the basics of word-processing. This is a serious weakness of the education system because teachers are supposed to help reduce the digital divide. If the agents of change are themselves behind, then how are they to teach children? Information and Communications Technology is an invaluable tool in teaching and learning situation. Only select schools have chosen for the World Link Programme. This program only caters for a few schools while the rest of the schools remain uninvolved. It is imperative that teachers should be at the forefront of the Information and Communications Technology as a matter of urgency.

The Ministry of Education is in the process of introducing cost recovery measures in education like it is happening in other fields like health. BOFESETE appreciates that while education is very important and it is a fundamental human right, we also appreciate that there may not be enough resources to cater for all the social needs of the country and parents may have to dig into their pockets to finance education. BOFESETE is however, insisting that no child should ever have to go without education because the parents cannot afford to pay the school fees. The Government must

ensure that there are enough social safety nets to ensure that the poorest of Batswana can still send their children to school.

BOFESEE would like to pay tribute to the unsung heroes and heroines of the educational and national development of this great country, the teachers. Without the sacrifices of the countless teachers who toiled under very challenging and arduous circumstances this country would not have developed to what it is in the time that it did. That Teachers Day gives awards to current serving teachers does not mean that the efforts of the countless teachers, many of whom have departed, some have resigned, others have retired, are not recognized. We owe a huge debt to the many teachers who have toiled under very poor conditions and for very little pay.

BOFESETE congratulates the teachers who have been chosen to receive the awards this year and says to them that they have made the name of the noble profession proud. Our tribute to those who receive awards for service of 25 and 30 years. We congratulate you for unselfishness and dedication to the noble profession. You stayed when others went for greener pastures somewhere and you deserve to be rewarded. Your efforts are a shining example to the rest of society.

BOFESETE is however disappointed that the process of generating names for teachers day awards seems to need a lot of improvement since there are disproportionately fewer teachers from secondary schools who make it to the list even though we know that there are many of them who are doing wonderful things with their students. We appeal to the authorities to rethink the process of generating names lest deserving teachers are left out. We also would like to see teachers from private schools taking a more active role in Teachers Day and also receiving awards because we know that they are also achieving commendable work.

In conclusion BOFESETE urges teachers to leave up to not only this years theme but the national vision as espoused in vision 2016. Teachers thave to play their role as role models of society, to be the light of society in molding future citizens of the country. We once more congratulate and applaud this years' winners and wish others teachers to also strive for higher ethical, moral and professional standards in education for national development.

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BOFESETE National Executive Committee