

7th June 2001

## **BOFESETE TEACHERS DAY MESSAGE**

On the occasion of the 4th Teachers Day to be celebrated nationally, BOFESETE extends warm greeting to the members of the important profession of teachers. The theme of this year is “Teacher Unity For Global Technological Challenges of the 21st Century-A Foundation for Quality Education”. Teachers Day is the most important day in the teaching calendar. This day is synonymous with Christmas in the Christian calendar or May Day for workers.

Teachers Day is a time for society to recognise and appreciate the tremendous work that teachers do on a daily basis. The hosts of the national celebrations captured it aptly when they stated in their official programmes “The nation appreciates excellence”. The few teachers who are receiving awards on the occasion of Teachers Day are a testimony to the value of excellence and dedication over the years. They have done so much with so little at their disposal for so little by way of reward. The selflessness of the many men and women who have toiled for decades cannot just be rewarded by the tokenism of a medal. They deserve much more than that. Many people who are doing less valuable work than the teachers are rewarded better than the teachers. This is an injustice, which must be corrected. In the olden days teachers used to be lavished with presents of agricultural produce in appreciation of the work they do. We no longer live in that era, the era that we are in places more value on the purse or the salary. The Ministry of Education should be serious about paying teachers better, otherwise teachers will migrate to other countries in search of greener pastures. The medals are however, of immense intrinsic value.

Teachers Day comes at a time when there are important developments in the Public sector organisations with regard to unionisation. The Govt has ratified appropriate International Labour Organisation (ILO) conventions regarding the Unionisation of Public sector organisations. We applaud the govt for taking this brave step. We however would like to urge the govt to go all the way and amend the appropriate legislation that would allow public sector organisation to convert to union status. Union status would allow the public sector organisations to really negotiate and bargain instead of just being informed or consulted, as is the case now. This move would allow the Teacher Unions to actually bargain with the government on many issues of conditions of service. The current arrangement does not provide any meaningful negotiation with government because government is not bound to listen to the workers representatives.

The current arrangement does not allow the representatives of organisations like BCSA, BTU, BOFESETE etc any meaningful negotiation with the Government on things that matter most. Public sector organisations must be allowed to bargain and even go on strike if need be, yes I repeat, they should be allowed to go on strike when need be. This is not an encouragement of wildcat strikes but to recognise the right to withdraw ones labour as a legitimate tool of negotiation.

The theme of this year Teachers Day recognises the immense value that Information and Communications Technology (ICT) plays in the work/life of teachers and the rest of society. There can be no overemphasising the importance of ICT in the work and social life of teachers. There is a real danger that teachers are being left behind the digital revolution that is taking place the world

over. There is evidence that other government workers are ahead of teachers in terms of access to the information technology. More and more civil servants have email addresses like somebody@gov.bw while only a miniscule number of teachers have to make do with web based addresses like ateacher@yahoo.com and other such private arrangements. It's only in a few schools that teachers have access to the Internet. The number of teachers without computer skills is shocking. It is a national scandal that we have so many teachers who are computer illiterate.

Teachers are supposed to be at the lead of technological and social changes because they are purveyors of knowledge. If teachers are still transmitting and receiving knowledge in old and antiquated methods then they risk losing touch with the modern learners. The government has an onerous responsibility to transform teachers and make them computer literate in skills and thinking. This process has to be undertaken yesterday rather than tomorrow and must be given high priority like PMS is receiving now.

The process of improving the computer skills of teachers is not the sole responsibility of the government. Individual teachers also have the responsibility to undertake self-development. Many teachers have access to private schools that offer computer tuition at reasonable rates, but teachers do not utilise such facilities. We as teachers cannot just rely on the govt to do everything for us. Self-development is important; the spirit of Ipelegeng should not be allowed to die. Teachers must aim to own their own personal computer at home if there is none at the school. In this regard BOFESETE has launched a scheme to facilitate ownership of computers by teachers in the same way that government provides for ownership of cars by the stop order system. Regrettably this scheme is not being utilised satisfactorily, teachers are not buying computers like cell phones. Our vision is that every teacher must have a computer at home and most of these computers must be connected to the Internet. The Internet is a important source of knowledge and information. It has to be appreciated that teachers are knowledge workers. Their students expect of them to have answers to everything, even though the role of teachers should be to teach learners how to find information. It is important to bridge the digital divide. Let every teacher make this year the year of ICT skills and (software and hardware). (Aim to be computer proficient by the end of the year).

AIDS continues to be a source of concern for the teaching fraternity and the society at large. Teachers must continue to be at the forefront of the war against this scourge. They should rise to the challenge that faces the rest of humanity. The greatest opportunity is with regard to the clients of teachers, the students, especially those at lower levels. That is where there is a chance to build an AIDS free society. By imparting the knowledge and the attitude towards safer sexual practices, teachers can strike a blow against AIDS. Teachers have to answer the call to arms by the President.

Quality of education in public schools continues to be a source of concern to BOFESETE. Many Batswana continue to send their students to outside the country and the local private schools. Why should Batswana children be sent outside the country for primary and secondary education? In what ways is public education failing to address the needs of the Batswana who do that? The Ministry of Education must investigate how it can address this issue because it is indicative of a problem or a perception of a problem. Teachers must strive to provide quality education at all times because the development of the country depends on the education of each and every child. Each child who fails in a school is a big loss to the country, given the expense of expatriate labour and other related problems. Education is the major weapon to address the challenges that face the country. It is

therefore imperative that the weapon that we use must be of the highest quality and sharpness for the country to hope to reap the benefits of the investments. All issues that impact on the quality of public education must be addressed, particularly at the foundation of primary.

Structural impediments to quality education must be removed. Policies like levels of operation, which tend to stigmatise and downplay the formative levels of education, must be scrapped.

The centrality of teachers in any education system can never be over emphasised. Nothing can take the place of teachers and, even the most sophisticated computer software can not do what teachers do. A countries education system cannot be better than its teachers. The revised National Policy on Education has long recognised the vital role played by teachers in society. To highlight the universal importance of teachers in society the world over, BOFESETE gives you extracts and quotes from world leaders on the occasion of last years World Teachers Day that was celebrated last year on October 5th. These quotes were extracted from the Internet from the Web site of Education International (the world organisation of teacher unions). The quotes succinctly illustrate the pivotal role of teachers in society.

Charles Platt says, “Teachers don’t just teach; they can be vital personalities who help young people to mature, to understand the world and to understand themselves.”

Colin N. Power captures the nature of teaching very well by saying, “the education of the child has to be a total development of the personality and this means this means that the human dimension of development is crucial. This is something which can only be done by teachers.”

Carl Gustav Jung says “One looks with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but the warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.”

Jacques Delors says “ The position as master or mistress in the classroom should be recognised by society and should be given the necessary authority and suitable resources.”

Henry Golden says, “In the schoolhouse, we have the heart of the whole society”

“What office is there which involves more responsibility, which requires more qualifications and which ought to, be more honourable than that of teaching?” asks Harriet Martineau.

The famous American president John Fitzgerald Kennedy said “Our progress as a nation can be no swifter than the progress in education”

The philosopher, Bertrand Russel says “teachers are more than any other the guardians of civilization”.

Christa McAuliffe simply says “I touch the future. I teach.”

Perhaps the most apt statement is from Federico Mayor when he stated the obvious truth that “We can not enter the learning society, an education age, without giving teachers the recognition they deserve.”

Former Chief Executive Officer of Chrysler Motor Corporation and management guru, Lee Iacocca says that “In a completely rational society, the best of us would be teachers and the rest of us would have to settle for something less.”

Ruth Limerick says “Teachers have an enormous role to play in the education of not only the students but the education of the nation. They are surrogate mothers. They are social workers, lawyers, and doctors. They are practically everything in the community.” This is certainly very true of teachers in Botswana who have to perform all these roles in the absence of the other professionals particularly in the disadvantaged sectors of our society. The role of teachers goes beyond transmitting information on subjects like mathematics, science, history and the like. The reward system must recognise and take into consideration the totality of a teachers responsibilities and duties.

Jacques Delors again says, “The importance of the role of teacher as an agent of change, promoting understanding, and tolerance, has never been more obvious today. It is likely to be even more critical in the twenty first century.”

Mary Hatwood Futrell, the president of Education International says “As we look at the 21st century we recognise that societies all around the world are changing dramatically, and therefore I think teachers will make a tremendous difference in the lives of individuals, the lives of communities, and the lives of nations.”

The Secretary General of Education International Fred van Leeuwen says, “One of the prime challenges of the 21st century will be to implement the standards of democracy, human rights and education for all – to complete the unfinished business of the 20th century.”

The last quote from the Internet article is reserved for the immediate former president of the United States of America Mr Bill Clinton. He simply says, “The 21st century must be century of education and the century of teachers”

To the award winners and the to the rest of us who have not as yet won an award BOFESETE would like to use with the words Donna Fargo when she said “ Thank you for the answering the call to be a teacher. Thank you for the enduring impression you’ve made in the lives you have touched. Every community needs people like you. Your contributions are permanent. You improve our world. You are so important.”

Thank you very much. Long live teachers.

BOFESETE National Executive Committee