

## **BOFESETE WORRIED BY TRANSPORTATION OF STUDENTS BY TRUCKS**

The issue of transporting students in open trucks seems to be far from over if one has to go with Minister of Education's (Nkate) remarks recently. (Botswana Federation of Secondary Teachers Association) BOFESETE has raised and condemned this many times in its congresses and other meetings and passed resolutions that transporting students in open trucks should stop. The recent Masa-as-ele programme on the 27 July 2005 and Mmegi Newspaper article of same date have helped to re-look at the issue. In response, the Minister however did not even raise the hope of overcoming this horrific practice that has claimed lives of innocent students and teachers. BOFESETE strongly condemns this form of transportation and even discourages schools from using it. The worst part is that all these calls are falling on deaf ears, resulting in students losing their lives. In addition, some students and teachers today carry indelible scars and some are disabled. These are some of the fatal accidents: In 1995, nine students and one teacher of Gosemama secondary school in Tswapong died while others were seriously injured. In the same year again, two Setlalekgosi secondary school students died around Dikabeya when traveling in a school truck. In 2003, five students from Kedia primary school in the Boteti area died when their truck overturned. Recently, in March 2005, two students of Shakawe secondary school died after their truck overturned. Others, including teachers were seriously injured.

All these accidents occurred when students were traveling under the auspices of the Ministry of Education. It is therefore the Minister's responsibility to see to it that students are transported safely. In the Mmegi article, the Minister is reported as saying that "a bus costs P500000" and that "it is not cost effective to buy buses for schools". In other words, the Minister strongly implies that the lives of students and teachers are not that valuable and therefore the Ministry does not find any urgency in buying the buses. Nkate is said to have said that "there are over 1000 schools in Botswana and it is not practical to share buses". What BOFESETE has been calling for is not 1000 buses but that schools are already clustered such that they easily share the resources. Such clusters are in fact already in place as they are used by subject associations, BISA and other existing structures. Schools in regions have always shared buses. So it is practical to share the resources if the Minister was not aware.

Mr. Nkate further fears that the buses would be underutilized and "would spend most times under trees when there are no activities". We cannot imagine any period of time when the buses would not be utilized.

We have ball sports and athletics throughout the year. Educational excursions will now be possible as most syllabi demands. When schools are closed students also undertake educational trips and some have failed in the past because of lack of transport. Besides, a number of private and some government aided schools do have buses that are not kept under trees. These include Moeding College, Mater Spei, Maun Senior, Maruapula, Phakalane etc. In addition, other government departments can also use the buses if they need them, as schools are already doing that with some institutions. Nkate further says that "there are areas where buses cannot go because the roads are inaccessible". Due to modern technology, vehicles could be converted into safe four wheel drive passenger carriers. This then easily solves the pains Nkate is undergoing. Where there is a will, there is a way, as the saying goes. BOFESETE feels the Ministry of

Education is not giving this issue the attention it deserves and we call upon them to help stop the deaths by procuring buses as an urgent matter in the next financial year.

Like vision 2016 is calling, we need a safe and secure nation, otherwise the Minister's inaction will be interpreted as implying that vision 2016 is an illusion.

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