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The June month is dedicated to commemoration of the SOWETO uprising that took place on 16 June 1976. It was led by school children protesting against the introduction of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction in South African Schools by the apartheid regime. The apartheid regime enforced a separate development system to maintain supremacy of the minority over the majority. This was with a view to sustain segregation, suppression of political right for black people, inequality, promotion of inhuman and degrading treatment of black people with impunity! All laws, policies, programmes, plans and strategies promoted injustice and exclusion of the majority. The youth of 1976 are remembered for their bravery in organising a historical protest to confront a heavily armed state security with lethal grenades, tear gas, preventing them from expressing their views against inferior education system! School children across SOWETO townships joined the protest to resist lessons to be taught in Afrikaans. This dark day ended with many youth massacred, injured, arbitrarily arrested and many skipped the country in fear of reprisals, extra judicial killings targeting youth leaders and organisers of the march.

This year commemoration of the youth month coincide with efforts to combat an invisible new novel coronavirus which is affecting the global community. The government has placed the nation under lockdown with restrictive measures to contain the pandemic. These include maintenance of hygiene, regular washing of hands with safe water, soap, sanitising and social distancing. These measures are set to save lives of citizens from contacting the virus! The country completed alerts levels 5, 4 and commenced alert level 3 on 1 June 2020. Although this level eased some regulations allowing movement of people, the public is still required to observe hygiene protocols and ensure compliance to curb the virus, including washing of hands with safe water, social distancing, scanning and tracking of infected people, sanitising, especially in public & private lives. The Department of Basic Education had reported it's preparedness and readiness to reopen schools and learners to assume classes as from 1 June 2020. However, many schools are not adequately prepared to implement the protocol set to prevent COVID 19. There are schools without infrastructure for safe water, sanitation and still using pit toilets. HURISA has been monitoring the situation closely in collaboration with it's Human Rights Forum and Youth Economic & Social network.

A petition was issued with recommendations to DBE protect the health and well-being of all children. Dates for reopening schools has been postponed to 8 June 2020. We are concerned that many schools might not be ready to reopen on 8 June 2020 living behind many disadvantaged children from learning!

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We are calling the DBE to protect the rights of all children in South Africa and prioritise the needs in disadvantaged schools particularly to ensure all school adhere to protocols adopted to curb coronavirus. Provide adequate assistance to these schools to enable them practice hygiene, including washing hands regularly with safe water and soap, sanitisers, with safe and healthy sanitation and keeping social distance to avoid overcrowding in classes.

Kind Regards
Juley Rakgotho
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