DEPUTY MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

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AT THE

INTERNATIONAL ALBINISM DAY 2026

"PROUDLY IN MY SKIN: CELEBRATING ALL SKIN TONES."

ON

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Programme Director,
United Nations Resident Coordinator and representatives of the United Nations in South Africa,
Representatives of the Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria,
Representatives of the National Albinism Task Force,
Leaders of Organisations of Persons with Disabilities,
Traditional leaders, faith leaders, civil society partners, educators, health workers, community leaders,
Distinguished guests,
And most importantly, persons with albinism, parents, caregivers and families whose dignity and leadership bring us together today,

Good morning.

Allow me to begin by expressing appreciation to all partners who have made this commemoration possible. International Albinism Awareness Day is not only a date on the global calendar. It is a moment of truth. It is a moment that asks whether the promise of dignity, equality and freedom has reached every body, every skin tone, every child, every school, every clinic, every workplace, every family and every community in our Republic.

We gather under a powerful theme: ***"Proudly in my skin: celebrating all skin tones."***

This theme is gentle, but it is also radical. It is gentle because it affirms the beauty and dignity of every person. It is radical because it challenges

a society that has too often used skin, colour, disability and difference as reasons to exclude, mock, isolate, harm and dehumanise.

To say “proudly in my skin” is to reject shame. It is to reject stigma. It is to reject myths and stereotypes. It is to reject the idea that some bodies must explain themselves before they are accepted. Persons with albinism are not objects of pity. They are not spectacles of curiosity. They are not symbols to be remembered only when tragedy occurs.

Persons with albinism are children, parents, learners, workers, artists, entrepreneurs, activists, professionals, public servants, intellectuals and leaders. They are citizens of the Republic. They are rights-holders. They are equal before the law.

This year’s commemoration comes at a significant moment in our national journey. In 2026, we mark 30 years of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa**,** 50 years since the 1976 Youth Uprising**,** and 70 years since the 1956 Women’s March**.**

These anniversaries are not separate from today’s conversation. They form the moral foundation of this gathering.

Seventy years ago, the women of 1956 marched to the Union Buildings and declared that their bodies, movement, families and dignity could not be controlled by an unjust system. Fifty years ago, the youth of 1976 rose against an education system that sought to humiliate them in their own land. Thirty years ago, our Constitution gave legal expression to the dreams and sacrifices of generations by declaring that everyone is equal

before the law, everyone has inherent dignity, and no person may be unfairly discriminated against.

So today, we must ask: what does the Constitution mean for a child with albinism who cannot see the board clearly but is mocked for sitting in front? What does 1976 mean for a learner with albinism who is bullied in the classroom because adults have failed to create a culture of inclusion? What does 1956 mean for a woman or girl with albinism who must navigate stigma, myths, sexualised danger and fear? What does democracy mean if dignity remains beautiful in law but incomplete in life?

Programme Director, albinism is a genetic condition. It is inherited. It is not a curse. It is not a punishment. It is not witchcraft. It is not bad luck. It is part of human biological diversity.

But the deepest pain carried by many persons with albinism is not caused by genetics. It is caused by society. It is caused by stigma, myths, exclusion, poverty and systems that treat necessary support as optional. It is caused by communities that repeat harmful beliefs without understanding that words can wound, rumours can endanger, and silence can become complicity.

The lived realities of South Africans with albinism sit at the intersection of disability, colour-based discrimination, poverty, gender inequality, rural exclusion, unemployment, health access challenges, barriers in education and psychosocial trauma.

For many children with albinism, the first site of exclusion is the school. A child may struggle with visual impairment and yet not receive large-print

learning materials, front-row seating, assistive devices or teacher support. A child may be exposed to the sun during school activities without shade, sunscreen, protective clothing or understanding from adults. A child may be called names, stared at, excluded from friendship circles, or treated as different before being treated as brilliant, capable and deserving.

When this happens, it is not simply a failure of kindness. It is a failure of rights. A school that does not accommodate a learner with albinism undermines the right to education, the right to dignity, and the spirit of 1976.

For many persons with albinism, the health system is another critical site of dignity or neglect. Sunscreen, protective hats, appropriate clothing, dermatological support and eye care are not luxuries. They are not beauty products. They are essential tools for health, prevention, education, employment, mobility and participation.

When poverty prevents a family from buying sunscreen, that is not a private inconvenience. It is a public policy concern. When eye care is too expensive or too far away, it affects learning, confidence, safety, work and dignity. Inclusion is therefore not an abstract feeling.

Inclusion is a budget line. Inclusion is a clinic that understands. Inclusion is a teacher who accommodates. Inclusion is a workplace that provides reasonable accommodation. Inclusion is a police officer who takes threats seriously. Inclusion is a community that refuses myths.

There is also a deep psychosocial dimension to this conversation. Colour-based discrimination is often dismissed as harmless.

People say, “It was just a joke.” They say, “We were only looking.” They say, “That is how people talk.” But prolonged staring, mocking comments, exclusion, bullying, stereotypes and dehumanising language can leave lasting wounds. They can produce fear, anxiety, depression, isolation, trauma and internalised stigma.

Mental health must therefore be part of our response. We cannot speak about albinism only in terms of skin and eyes. We must also speak about the mind, the heart and the spirit. We must speak about the child who stops raising their hand in class because they fear laughter. We must speak about the young person who avoids public spaces because of staring. We must speak about the parent who carries fear every time their child leaves the house.

Our Department carries a mandate that brings together women, youth and persons with disabilities. That mandate teaches us that no struggle for dignity exists in isolation.

A woman with albinism may experience discrimination as a person with albinism, as a woman in a patriarchal society, as a Black woman in an unequal economy, as a rural woman far from services, and as a person exposed to harassment, myths and gender-based violence. A child with albinism may experience exclusion as a learner in an under-resourced school, as a child from a poor household, and as a child whose parents cannot afford protective products. A young person with albinism may face unemployment, appearance-based prejudice, inaccessible recruitment processes, weak reasonable accommodation and low expectations.

This is why our response must be intersectional. Our Constitution is itself an intersectional document. It does not protect people in fragments. It protects the whole person. It calls on us to understand that discrimination is often layered, and that justice must be deliberate, practical and responsive.

Programme Director, as government, we must strengthen coordination across departments and across all spheres of the state. The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities cannot do this work alone. The Departments of Health, Basic Education, Higher Education and Training, Employment and Labour, Justice and Constitutional Development, SAPS, municipalities, provinces, Chapter 9 institutions, the private sector, families, schools, faith communities, traditional councils, media houses and civil society all have a role.

This is the meaning of a whole-of-society approach.

It also means that persons with albinism must never be treated as guests in conversations about their own lives. Nothing about persons with albinism without persons with albinism.

We must confront dangerous myths directly. Harmful beliefs do not disappear because we are uncomfortable naming them. They disappear when communities are educated, when leaders speak with moral clarity, when law enforcement acts decisively, when survivors are supported, and when society sends one message without ambiguity: the life of a person with albinism is sacred, equal and protected.

There can be no cultural defence for harm. There can be no traditional justification for violence. There can be no religious excuse for discrimination. Culture must be a home of dignity, not a hiding place for abuse. Tradition must be a river of wisdom, not a weapon against the vulnerable. Faith must heal, not harm.

As government, we must move from awareness to implementation. We need awareness with budgets. Awareness with policy. Awareness with trained officials. Awareness with accessible services. Awareness with monitoring. Awareness with accountability.

To educators, the classroom is where democracy either becomes real or begins to fail. Every child with albinism is not asking for special treatment. They are asking for equal access.

To health workers, your care can change the direction of a life. When you treat the needs of persons with albinism seriously, you affirm dignity.

To traditional and faith leaders, your voices carry power. Use that power to protect life and reject myths.

To the private sector, disability inclusion cannot remain trapped in corporate social investment. It must shape hiring, procurement, product development and workplace culture.

To families, raise children with albinism in pride. Do not allow the world to teach them shame before you have taught them strength.

And to young people with albinism, I want to say: you belong. You belong in our schools, universities, workplaces, businesses, sport, arts, science, technology, politics, media and public life. You are not the margins of our democracy. You are part of its centre.

Programme Director, the women of 1956 did not march so that future generations would inherit fear. The youth of 1976 did not rise so that future learners would be humiliated in classrooms. The Constitution of 1996 was not adopted so that equality would remain a beautiful word in legal books while people continue to suffer preventable exclusion.

We honour 1956 by protecting women and girls with albinism from stigma, violence and exclusion. We honour 1976 by making every school safe, inclusive and accessible. We honour 30 years of the Constitution by ensuring that equality reaches clinics, classrooms, workplaces, police stations, courts, families and communities.

Let this International Albinism Awareness Day be remembered not only for what we said, but for what we changed after we said it. Let it be remembered as a moment when we moved from awareness to accountability, from sympathy to justice, from visibility to power, from stigma to pride.

In the spirit of the theme, ***"Proudly in my skin: celebrating all skin tones,"*** let us build a South Africa where every person with albinism can walk freely, learn fully, work with dignity, access care without struggle, and live without being reduced to their skin.

A democracy is not measured only by the rights it writes down. It is measured by the lives it lifts up.

Together, let us end stigma. Together, let us confront myths. Together, let us protect dignity. Together, let us build a society where every skin tone is celebrated, every body is respected, and every person belongs.

I thank you.