

SPEECH BY HONOURABLE MEC MR SAM KWELITA IN NIEU
BETHESDA

Programme Director

Members of Parliament

The Executive Mayor

Councillors

Our Senior Citizens

Government departments

Stakeholders

Community members

And everyone present

I greet you all

Today, we feel honored to be part of these celebrations where we honor our older persons. These are true custodians of our values, heritage and culture.

We have seen them participating in different games that will help them to maintain their physical and mental strength. These great legs can indeed convey a story of where we come from as a nation. They have seen and experienced everything. That is why we call them custodians of our values

In reality, many have viewed old age as a social challenge where older persons are portrayed as dependent individuals, lacking social autonomy, slow, weak, chronically ill, neglected and a burden to the producing world when compared to the younger generation. Social Policy analysts and makers have concentrated more on what can be termed the “burden of dependency” and as a result have

neglected the fundamental role which social policy can play in structuring the lives of older persons.

In addition, older persons have been described in terms of cost factors who always require more help and support which neither the family nor the state can afford. This general misleading view has led many to believe that older persons are a national threat and this has without doubt acted as an obstacle to policy development. Older persons have been relegated to mere passive observers.

This view has been primarily supported by social welfare policies that have robbed the aged population the right to participate in the socio economic programmes of governments. These policies have been based on the assumption that society has a major responsibility of only providing basic social welfare services to older persons. All these stereotypes have led to the creation of a relatively passive and disenchanted sector of the population of older persons which has painted a negative picture that has led to the marginalization of older persons by younger generation.

As champions of Social Development, we have seen a number of older persons being physically and sexually abused, robbed and killed for their social grants and neglected by family members. We only see our elderly being cleaned properly during pension days.

As government, we have realized that, participation by older persons in the socio economic development of this country is of utmost importance. This has led our National Assembly to pass an Act that seeks to fight for the rights of older persons. The New Act focuses on active participation by older persons with regard to social transformation:

- It shifts the emphasis from institutional care to community based care in order to ensure that an older person remains in his or her home within the community for as long as possible.
- It provides the platform for them to participate in community life in any position appropriate to their interests and capabilities.
- To actively participate in intergenerational programmes.
- To participate in activities that enhance their income generating capacity.
- To live in an environment that caters for their changing capacities.
- To access opportunities that promote their optimal level of social, physical, mental and emotional well being.

In essence, the Actl seeks to advocate for the rights of older persons to participate in developmental, political, social, cultural and economical activities of their country and not be regarded as mere beneficiaries. It also seeks to give them access to knowledge, education and training.

At the same time, we view their contribution to family and community values as vital as it cannot be measured in economic terms. With the rebuilding of our moral fibre led by the Moral Regeneration Movement, we see older persons as key ambassadors and role models that our young people can learn from.

Today the whole world as we do celebrates the international day for older persons. In this corner of the world we celebrate our elderly as our pride, our heritage , reservoir of our culture, values and' think tanks 'who have managed to shape our destiny ,reshape our social ,political and economic landscape and who continue to serve as care givers as the young people are ravaged by the HIV and

AIDS pandemic . As our senior citizens we are still relying on you to share your skills so that we can sustain the good work you have been doing from generation to generation.

“Let us all build a caring society together”

I thank you