

MEDIA RELEASE **PSA concerned about safety of learners and educators**

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The Public Servants Association (PSA) is extremely concerned about the safety of learners and educators at most public schools where security is non-existent or inadequate.

The recent chaos at Kagiso Secondary School, which resulted in an educator shooting and killing a knife-wielding attacker, highlights the PSA's concerns. In another incident, a learner was killed at Geluksdal Secondary School in Brakpan after an argument between learners during school hours. In the Kagiso Secondary incident, the attacker found his way to the school's principal with the intention of causing him harm as he attempted to stab the principal. The attacker was accompanied by other persons who fled after hearing the gunshot. This raises further concerns about the efficiency of security when armed strangers can easily enter a schoolyard without being detected.

Apart from an ongoing lack of resources and overcrowding, bullying and gangsterism are serious matters that require not only the Department of Basic Education's intervention but involvement by society at large. Whilst the focus is also an educator who brought a gun onto the school premises, whereas schools are supposed to be a gun-free and safe space for learners and educators, the reality is different. Educators are aware that their environment is not safe and conducive, with realities of attacks by learners and members of the public. The Department is not able to provide much-needed protection as required by the *Occupational Health and Safety Act* that places a legal burden and obligation on employers to provide a workplace that is safe and without risks to employees.

In view of mounting concern about the safety of learners and educators on school premises, the PSA launched a *#SchoolSafety* program in 2020. As part of this behaviour-changing initiative, schools are visited to engage and motivate learners in cooperation with the Department of Basic Education, the South African Police Service, and Old Mutual.

The PSA encourages communities to embrace schools as safe places to ensure an optimum environment for teaching and learning and better results for learners. The PSA also encourages the private sector to support this program to not only safeguard learners and educators, but to restore dignity and trust in schools. It cannot be accepted that schools become places of violence and bullying with parents and families not being sure that their loved ones will return. The provision of security officers at schools and metal detectors will also assist to improve security at schools. The PSA further advises government to consider using Expanded Public Works Programme workers to assist with access control at schools where the Department and school governing bodies are failing to employ security guards.

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