

30 JUNE 2020

**PEU MEDIA STATEMENT ON THE SECOND PHASE OF
SCHOOLS RE-OPENING, SCHEDULED FOR 06 JULY 2020**

The Professional Educators' Union (PEU) is noting with concern that the second phasing-in of re-opening of schools, scheduled for 06 July 2020 comes amid flaring COVID-19 infection rate, that has finally thrust the country into a calamitous and decimating storm.

It is further disconcerting to note that since the first phase of schools reopening for grades 7 and 12 on 08 June 2020, majority of our schools are getting closed by the day, as teachers and learners are testing positive of COVID-19, thereby defeating the very same purpose why schools have been reopened for, namely, to salvage the academic year, as learning and teaching becomes negatively affected in the process.

Grades R, 1, 2, 3, 6, 10 and 11 constitute a fifty-two (52%) percentage of our school enrolment, which stretch the capacity of majority of our schools in terms of infrastructure to the limit, to can cope with high volume of learners, as additional classrooms and human resource are needed, to comply with physical distancing, which is one of the key factors to the safety containment measures against COVID-19 infection. If the survey results on 29 June 2020, sampled from school principals across the country is anything to go by, the system can brace itself for a more disastrous situation than witnessed when schools struggled to reopen on 08 June 2020, as many schools are without water, ablution facilities, fewer classrooms and have not yet received PPEs for the coming grades. None of the provinces is ready with a plan to hire additional teachers to replace those who are infected and off sick.

As the country grabbles with the high number of daily infections, which is cumulatively standing at Hundred and Forty-four Thousand Two-Hundred and Sixty-Four (144 264) with over Two-Thousand five-hundred (2 500) deaths at the moment, our health system is already showing signs of being severely strained, as most health workers are also stretched to the limit. Of late, it has

been observed that health workers take two to three days to respond and attend to reported cases of infections in schools, thereby unnecessarily exposing majority of teachers and learners to further infections. The tracing process of contact people of those infected is gradually dissipating from the radar, which then aggravates the rate of infections in communities.

One of our over-arching concerns as PEU is that more learners are reopening right in the middle of winter, which is the influenza season and aggravating conditions for COVID-19, according to medical and epidemiological science, which will see many schools closed.

As PEU, we however get solace from the fact that the directions issued by Basic Education on phasing-in of schools reopening are not set in stone, which then give schools options to adopt, after they shall have carefully assessed their situations in terms of infrastructure and human resource capacity, a time-tabling system that will best suite their schools, without compromising safety containment measures against COVID-19 and be able to cope with a sizable enrolment of learners on daily basis. We are alive to the fact that the directions are skewed towards favoring, in the main, private schools and former model C schools, as they will continue as normal, due to their inherited high quality infrastructure and capacity to deal with any eventuality at any given time, whilst majority of schools in our poor communities continue to bear the brand of the debilitating effect of COVID-19, with higher risk of contacting the pandemic.

We also wish to call upon all teachers with comorbidities, to follow and utilize the provisions of Collective Agreement NO 1 of 2020 and refrain from compromising their dear lives in the name of nation building. We further urge those who encounter challenges with their Managers, particularly emanating from interpretation of the Collective Agreement, to report such cases with their immediate PEU structures.

May we always remain vigilant and be on high alert, by strictly adhering to the safety containment measures, as we navigate through our adulation road amid the pandemic.

One death of a teacher or learner in their quest for education is one death too many.

ISSUED BY GENERAL SECRETARY. Cell No: 079 515 1165