

# Disabled People South Africa

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The Honourable Dr Rina Venter  
Minister of National Health and Population Development

BY FAX: (021) 45 1575

Dear Dr Venter,

## WITHDRAWAL OF THE DPSA DELEGATION FROM THE INTERIM FORUM ON DISABILITY ISSUES

I am directed by my executive to inform you of the reasons for our withdrawal from the initial meeting of the forum on 7 April 1992, as well as our current position in relation to our further participation.

At the outset, I must re-affirm our commitment to participation in an appropriate and effective national forum on disability issues. We proposed the disbandment of the Inter-departmental Committee for the Care of the Disabled only after it became apparent that that body met neither criteria. We participated fully in the negotiations which then led to the forum concept and endorsed the outcome fully.

In the run-up to the launch of the forum, DPSA undertook (in the context of the Federal Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled) to brief extra-parliamentary parties on the forum concept, so as to ensure its survival in the transition to democracy. We did this by briefing the African National Congress directly (who have assured their support for the forum concept) and by making a submission to this effect to CODESA.

These things we did with enthusiasm and commitment, believing that we were finally on the road to addressing disability issues. We then awaited the launch of the forum and, when the date was finally announced, put together a representative delegation from around the country.

On the side of the department of National Health, we understood their task of facilitating the launch of the forum to at least include the following actions:

1. To obtain your approval of the launch of the forum on the terms of the agreement reached between the parties to the negotiations. This, we were told by letter dated 27 December 1991, was done.

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2. To brief the other departments involved to achieve their support for the forum and the appointment of their 'high level representatives'.

The representative from the department of Transport clearly had little idea of the purpose of the forum and left, without apology, at lunch.

The representative from Manpower announced that he was only an 'observer'.

The representative that was supposed to be from the department of National Education was in fact from the Department of Education and Training. This gentleman was overheard by the DPSA delegation saying that he wished the meeting to end soon as he would rather be watching cricket. Such insensitivity made people really angry.

While your own department was strongly represented from both the health and welfare sections, you will understand our perception that the task in relation to the other departments was poorly undertaken.

3. To make practical arrangements for the meeting, including the availability of funding for travel and accommodation of the delegates.

The department has had since the final meeting of the ICCD on 23 October 1991, or at least since your approval of the forum in December, to make these arrangements.

Following a meeting of the Federal Council on 27 February, a fax was sent to the department requesting information on the procedures to be followed for claiming travel and accommodation costs. In a telephonic response on 14 March, Dr Hattingh informed us that no budgetary provision had been made by the department. A fax was then sent to Dr Slabber on 26 March appealing for his personal intervention to ensure that funds be made available for the meeting. We were told that the matter would be discussed at the meeting on 7 April.

In the meeting, the department officials were only able to confirm that no provision had been made and that there were therefore no funds available. They were unable to even make a commitment that funding would be available for the future work of the forum, saying that the department now intended setting up a number of 'service field' forums and could not be expected to bear the costs of all of these.

At this point, the DPSA delegation requested an adjournment so that we, together with the disabled delegates from the national councils, could consider our position. We found that every one of the disabled people present were deeply frustrated, angry and disappointed at the clear lack of commitment on the part of the State officials. A proposal that we withdraw from the meeting in protest was immediately and unanimously adopted.

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We are simply not prepared to be co-opted into another farcical system such as the ICCD was. The forum as it was envisaged and agreed, had the potential to be different.

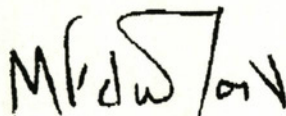
We believe that the officials concerned should be severely reprimanded and instructed to urgently make adequate preparations for a further attempt at launching the disability forum.

In the negotiation stage of the forum last year, we expressed our doubts about the disability directorate being located within your department, since disability is far more than a health and welfare issue, a fact seldom appreciated by health and welfare professionals. What has happened since only serves to increase our doubts.

Although we are copying this correspondence to CODESA and the ANC, we do not propose, at this stage, to alter our recommendations to these parties via a via the forum concept.

We will also, as a demonstration of good faith, not to make a media issue of our withdrawal, in anticipation of a positive response to this direct approach to you.

Yours sincerely,



MIKE DU TOIT  
SECRETARY GENERAL

cc Dr William Rowland, Chairperson, Interim Forum on Disability Issues  
The DPSA Delegation  
The Federal Council for the Rehabilitation of the Disabled  
CODESA  
African National Congress