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18 March 2021

**Joint media statement: Equal Education and Equal Education Law Centre call for investigations around a learner being forced into a pit latrine to be carefully, quickly and sensitively handled - and demand government move faster to eradicate plain pit latrines at 1 243 Eastern Cape schools**

Equal Education and the Equal Education Law Centre call on the Eastern Cape Education Department (ECDOE) and the South African Council of Educators (SACE) to carefully, quickly and sensitively investigate the Luthuthu Junior Secondary School principal, Lubeko Mgandela, accused of forcing an 11-year-old learner to retrieve a cellphone from a pit latrine. It is deeply disturbing that a learner could be dehumanised and endangered in this way, and continuous psychosocial support must immediately be made available by the ECDOE for all the affected learners and their families.

We **again** demand that the Department of Basic Education (DBE) and the ECDOE show the urgency that is needed to provide safe and dignified toilets to the 1,243 schools that have plain pit latrines as the only form of toilet, according to the latest National Education Infrastructure Management System ([NEIMS](#)) statistics.

The incident at Luthuthu Junior Secondary School is a horrible reminder of the deaths of Lumka Mkhethwa and Michael Komape, in pit latrines at their schools. Last week, 12 March, was the third anniversary of [five-year-old Lumka](#) tragically losing her life.

The [Norms and Standards For Public School Infrastructure](#), signed into law by Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga in 2013, bans plain pit latrines from all schools in South Africa! If the loss of life, and now the violation of the rights of yet another learner, does not move the ECDOE and DBE to accelerate service delivery, then, what will? Our engagements with education departments, and our [analysis of the latest provincial school infrastructure reports](#), show that the departments still struggle with the basics such as accurate and accessible data, clear and coordinated planning, as well as making sure that the implementing agents and contractors that build schools on behalf of the government are held accountable.

In his [2019 SONA](#) President Ramaphosa spoke about the Sanitation Appropriate for Education (SAFE) initiative, which was launched the previous year, and is meant to replace 3,898 unsafe toilets in public schools. The President said that since launching the initiative, **699 schools had been provided with safe and appropriate toilets** and that projects in a further 1,150 schools were either in planning, design or construction stages.

But information that we have found contradicts what the President said about the SAFE Initiative. A recent [response](#) by the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to members of Parliament states that, of the 2,865 schools that were later identified for intervention under the SAFE initiative, only 683 have received new toilets, while 340 schools have toilets under construction - the remaining 1 842 schools are planned for 2021/22. According to Basic Education Minister Angie Motshekga's [performance contract](#), the SAFE initiative is meant to conclude its work by 21 March 2022. This is highly unlikely to happen, considering the slow pace of delivery over the past few years. A lack of transparency and regular publicly available updates around the SAFE initiative makes it difficult for the public to monitor construction and interrogate the claims of progress.

The slow pace of delivery of school infrastructure has been made worse by the National Treasury making cuts to infrastructure grants. It was recently [reported](#) that the ECDOE has suspended almost all building projects because there isn't enough money to complete them. We must see this for what it is - the consequence of austerity and government reducing how much it spends on education is a violation of learners' constitutional rights to dignity, equality and quality basic education.

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**To arrange an interview, contact:**

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