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# A CONGRATULATORY MESSAGE TO NATU TEACHERS ON THE OCCASION OF WORLD TEACHERS' DAY 2021

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“The Central Executive Board of the National Teachers' Union recognizes and is eternally grateful for the self sacrifices you continue to make to advance the hopes and aspirations of your learners, in furtherance of the developmental agenda of your country“.



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## **Background and History of World Teachers' Day**

The World Teachers' Day came about in the following way: on 5, October 1966 UNESCO and the International Labour Organisation (ILO) organized an inter-governmental conference in Paris, France, to discuss the status of teachers. At the end of this conference, representatives of UNESCO and ILO signed a Recommendation which, for the first time, outlined the rights and responsibilities of teachers – as well as various aspects of the teaching profession across the world. On 5 October 1994, UNESCO created the first World Teachers' Day to focus attention on the participation and development of teachers, and to highlight teachers' issues and priorities regarding education. So, the date of October 5 was selected to internationally celebrate teachers' day because it was the anniversary of the adoption of the 1966 ILO/UNESCO Recommendation. In adopting this recommendation, governments realized the importance of qualified, competent and motivated teachers. On November 11, 1997, during the 29th session of UNESCO, a Recommendation to cover teaching and research personnel in higher education was adopted. NATU is grateful for this recognition given to teachers

## **Importance of World Teachers' Day**

This day is important in the life of every teacher because it is on World Teachers' Day that the services of teachers and their contributions to education are acknowledged – and their role and importance in the development of learners and society are appreciated. World Teachers' Day is an occasion that pays tribute to teachers worldwide, as pledges are made by authorities to resolve some of the issues that bedevil the profession and detract from the teachers' ability and capacity to discharge and fulfil their mandate

## **Theme for Teachers' World Day 2021**

Although not a public holiday, World Teachers' Day is observed globally and each year, UNESCO allocates a Theme for this Day. For the year 2021, the Theme of World Teachers' Day is "Teachers at the heart of education recovery." This theme was coined in respect of teachers' determined and diligent efforts throughout the crucial stages of the COVID-19 pandemic. Just as a reminder, on 31 December 2019, China informed the world that cases of pneumonia with an unknown cause had been detected in the city of Wuhan, Hubei Province; on 7 January 2020, the causative pathogen was identified as a novel (new) coronavirus; and on 11 February, the World Health Organisation gave the disease an official name: Coronavirus Disease 2019, abbreviated as COVID-19; on 1 March, a 38-year old South African man arrived back home from Italy where he had gone with his wife; the man subsequently consulted with a private general practitioner on 3 March – displaying symptoms of fever, headache, malaise, a sore throat and a cough; he was advised to self-isolate, pending diagnosis; on 5 March, the South African National Institute for Communicable Diseases confirmed that the man had tested positive for COVID-19; on 15 March 2020, a national state of disaster was declared, in terms of the South African Disaster Management Act 57 of 2002; on 18 March, all schools were closed ahead of a hard National Lockdown which took effect from 26 March to 30 April 2020. From 26 March 2020 up to the end of the year – and continuing to-date in 2021, the school curriculum has had numerous disruptions, resulting in many challenges insofar as normal teaching and learning across many South African schools has been concerned.

## **Taking Stock of the Destruction in the Wake of the COVID-19 Pandemic**

Much as there have been huge disruptions to the school system since the advent of COVID-19, there is still good reason to take a moment to celebrate the resilience and achievements of teachers belonging to the National Teachers' Union because we have first-hand knowledge of how well they have adapted to the hostile teaching conditions thrust upon them by the COVID19 pandemic. Last year when our beloved late NATU President, Mr Allen Thompson – MHSRIP, delivered his World Teachers' Day message to members, there were about 720 000 laboratory-confirmed cases of COVID-19 in South Africa, and about 19 000 COVID-19 related deaths. Today, we are close to 3 million laboratory-confirmed cases and close to 88 000 recorded deaths. This has been a huge disaster, to say the least, when one considers that these are not just numbers but human beings who would otherwise be alive today.

As frontline workers, teachers have not been spared the brunt of the COVID-19 pandemic. Inevitably, working under conditions of life and death, many of our colleagues have perished, alongside many of our relatives and friends. Lately, the pandemic's path of destruction has extended to school children – and many have also perished. Unfortunately, the hardships which have been associated with the COVID-19 pandemic were further exacerbated by bad governance, maladministration and mismanagement. The decimation of our society happened suddenly and quickly, as government failed not even honour salary increments to which it had appended its signature, in agreement. Academically, many teachers and school children suffered, particularly those in historically disadvantaged communities – aggravated by a lack of psycho-social support, dilapidated infrastructure with no, or inadequate, supply of clean water and no decent sanitation facilities in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. The attendant negative impact of all these adverse conditions on the culture of teaching and learning in these schools has been immeasurable. Unfortunately, even in the wake of these clear signs of neglect of historically disadvantaged schools, the requirements of our schools to operate efficiently have not been placed at the centre of the current curriculum recovery plans. To the extent that this has not been the case, NATU is greatly disappointed.

The limitations imposed upon the schooling system, as a result of the need to comply with the regulations of the world health emergency, curtailed face-to-face teaching and learning – and necessitated an urgent review of the traditional delivery protocols of instruction. Suddenly, schools were thrust into the space of online teaching and learning – as well as delivering instruction using various information and communication technologies which most teachers were not familiar and comfortable with. NATU is, nonetheless, pleased with the huge efforts made by teachers in adapting to the emergent teaching and learning demands, while operating in a crisis mode. Nonetheless, the possibility exists that, in reality, many of our teachers and learners still remain strangers to the new devices and ways of ICT communications they are expected to be au fait with. Thus, the focus should not just be on both covering and recovering the curriculum, but also recovering many teachers and learners who may be lost in the woods of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both teachers and learners need their skills to be honed for the new normal. This means that resources must be deliberately made available and dedicated for this purpose.

## **Taking a Moment to Celebrate NATU Teachers**

This Day gives us a golden opportunity to accolade teachers for their services to society. We decry the demise of yesteryears when teachers were highly respected, valued and were seen as role models for young people. In the present age, with the fourth industrial revolution suddenly upon us, teaching has become a very challenging and difficult profession. Our society now valorises and glorifies artists, sportsmen, politicians and even thieves as celebrities of note, 4 more than they acknowledge the good works of outstanding teachers. Without doubt, this has brought some considerable challenges to the status of the teaching profession worldwide. Consequently, families no longer support teachers' authority over their children in the classrooms and, on occasion, they have even faced threats and acts of violence from learners and their family members. As a result of all these challenges, it has become quite difficult to attract young creative minds to become teachers, particularly also as many governments fail to take bold steps to improve the financial rewards of teachers to keep them motivated within their chosen profession. It is for these and other reasons that today, we take time out to celebrate all of you, our teachers – individually and severally: you are icons of knowledge, hope and inspiration for the nation's children; you are the most influential force for quality education and national development; you are a source of the awareness and enlightenment that nourishes the nation's children with wisdom; you teach the nation's children the real skills they need to succeed in life; you teach the nation's children how to discover their talents and precise paths in life; it is only through your efforts, dedication, selflessness, hard work and commitment that the nation can achieve social justice for its people. We know and are aware that, despite being the true pillars of the nation's potential and success, you remain unrewarded with the warm gratitude which you so much deserve – and your status and working conditions remain distasteful and a laughingstock for many.

Well-done, NATU teachers – and congratulations for your resilience. The Central Executive Board of the National Teachers' Union recognizes and is eternally grateful for the self-sacrifices you continue to make to advance the hopes and aspirations of your learners, in furtherance of the developmental agenda of your country.

**Once again, Halalah, NATU teachers, Halalah!**

Mr Sibusiso Victor Malinga  
Acting President  
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