

The Minister of Basic Education, Angie Motshekga,
The Deputy Minister of Sport and Recreation, Gert Oosthuizen,
Leadership of Chess South Africa,
Leadership of the Supreme Chess Trust and the Moves for Life programme,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Good evening to you all.

It is with a great deal of pleasure that I address this launch of the Moves for Life Chess Programme.

As some of you may know, chess is very close to my heart and I regard this game very highly both as a player and a spectator.

This evening's function confirms that this game is now being taken seriously by decision makers in the sports and education fields in our country.

I agreed to be a patron and attend this launch because I believe that the time has come for us to mainstream chess as a sport in our country.

Contrary to popular belief, chess is a serious sport, and it is a game that young people should be encouraged to take part in.

It is an important game in many respects, the main benefit being that it contributes to the development of strategic thinking as well as concentration, analytical skills and problem solving.

These are traits that are very important for school going children.

Honoured guests,

Chess is by far one of the oldest and most played games in the world. It cuts across intellectual, age and language barriers and can therefore be enjoyed by people from across the world.

It has stood the test of time, and even new technology-driven games have not killed the game of chess, which makes veteran players like myself very happy.

I learned to play chess under unfavourable conditions, while on Robben Island serving a 10 year prison sentence.

Political prisoners used to sustain and strengthen themselves during incarceration through sports like soccer, rugby, table tennis, mrabaraba, bridge, patience and casino card games as well as chess.

We used to make chess boards from thin cardboard and chess pieces from corks. Given the opportunity, I would have loved to learn how to play at an earlier stage of my life.

That is because knowing how to play the game can prove to be invaluable for any young person.

That is why we want to convince parents and teachers that chess is one of the most powerful educational tools available to strengthen and enhance a child's mind.

No amount of video games can teach a child the same level of patience, strategic thinking, concentration, analytical skills and the attention to detail that they would gain from this timeless intellectual game.

A successful chess player will not only successfully analyse the situation in front of him or her, but will draw lessons from a host of previous actions.

Chess therefore enhances the ability to make thoughtful, considered, strategic decisions under pressure.

These are the same skills that are essential for effective examination performance at school, and also for decision making when one is entrusted with serious leadership positions at work or in the community.

Most importantly, the fact that advanced chess players demonstrate increased expertise in the making of tough and abstract decisions, makes them excel in subjects such as mathematics.

The reason is that chess helps one to significantly improve memory. This skill can easily be transferred to subjects where memory is necessary such as mathematics.

As government, we will promote this game in schools so that we can ensure that children who enter grade one matriculate with Mathematics as a subject.

Honoured guests,

It is evident that chess is more than just a game or a hobby. It is a way of life. You will then understand why we are encouraging young people to play chess at an early age.

In summary, the benefits that accumulate from the teaching and promotion of chess in schools include the following:

1. The game teaches patience. You have to give the opponent time and space to think and make his or her own move.

2. It teaches that a decision must be an outcome of a serious thought process.

3. Chess teaches discipline, for example as chess players would know, "touch is a move".

When you touch, you must move, you have to be disciplined.

4. Chess teaches fairness. You alert the opponent before you strike, and keep them informed of your moves and intentions.

Players know that once the king is under threat you alert your opponent by saying "check".

When you are convinced that he or she can no longer protect the king, you say "checkmate" to indicate that you have closed the game.

This decorum will teach the children that an opponent during a sports game is not an enemy but just a contestant that they must cooperate with.

They will learn to deal with opposition of any kind in a mature and tolerant way.

These are benefits that should make us all promote this important game to our youth. They should also make us support Chess SA in their endeavours to develop and promote the sport nationally, including in our rural areas.

Government and the private sector need to work together to create a culture where chess can be used as both an educational and motivational tool for children.

We will play our part as government. Both the Departments of Basic Education as well as Sports and Recreation are involved and already working to promote the game.

I thank all who are working hard to promote chess in schools and our communities. We look forward to working with you to make this game to grow from strength to strength.

We congratulate the Supreme Chess Trust in particular for the Moves for Life programme, which is being launched this evening. It has helped to kickstart this national focus on chess.

Working together, we can make learning a lot of fun for children, while investing in their intellectual development for the common good of the nation.

I Thank You