

## Quotes during the South Africa's pledge for older persons



The (NDMC) is the company that runs disaster management for South Africa. It is within a government department. It is state run. We look at all aspects around disaster management. We take both a reactive approach – after events – and risk reduction too. We also have an advocacy leg and a training and development element too. And that is how the structure is put together. We have a nerve centre when there are major disasters that take place, then we activate a nerve centre and all the role players from the sector get together so we can coordinate. Disaster management works on a decentralised basis in South Africa. We have a national centre, nine provincial centres, then districts and a number of municipalities. In terms of our legislation they should all have disaster management functions. Who are the people in need? The people at the lowest level. When disasters happen they need help so at the municipal level, which is the most important part.

In the area that we are, earlier in the year, we had an earthquake in the North West province. The specialists say it is based on seismic movement as a result of the deep mining we have here. In January we had a number of floods all over the country. In the last few weeks, we've had some serious fires as well. You'll have seen in the media that as late as last week there was a fire at an informal settlement, and about 1000 shacks burnt down. It is a diverse amount of disasters that we do have. There are also places in the country experiencing extreme drought. This is also declared a disaster. At any one point, you can have three or four types of disasters happening.

First of all mobility and getting to them early enough is a challenge for disaster management and older people] especially people who stay in very rural areas. The communication links to get to us to know that something has gone wrong, you miss the golden hour. Urbanisation is also. When you find a shack fire like the other day, the shacks are built so close to each other that fire services can't get into the area and by the time they do, a huge amount of devastation has taken place already.”

Ken Terry  
Executive Director  
National Disaster Management Centre  
South Africa

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Yesterday was the international day for older persons and disaster, and we were looking at the challenges face by older persons and coming up with the strategy of how to assist them in times of disaster. They identified that these people are most mostly vulnerable when it comes to this. They are prone to exploitation, they can be abused by dependents when it comes to their social grants, and also when it comes to issues of security, much needs to be done. For example, if a disaster erupts, these people need to run away quickly but at their age because they are often frail, they cannot do it quickly. So they really need to be assisted. We also looked at the issue of infrastructure, the role of facilities - making buildings accessible for their inabilities. We were looking at what we can do to ensure they live with dignity.

Most of the people in my area are predominantly black, and Africans have a culture of taking care of their own people. So there are few people who are taken to old age homes. The highest percentage still live with

their children. This is important because often older persons go to a strange place they do not feel comfortable there. They are comfortable in their own homes.

I think much needs to be done [in terms of supporting older people in times of disaster]. I don't think we are supporting them to the optimum level. That is why we are looking at this. For example, when you are old, you are having sight impairment, you can't hear well, you can't walk fast like a younger person. Now when disaster comes and you are at your home, some die of... For example, in terms of fire, you cannot run quickly. Some will die, not because of burns but they will be suffocated by the fumes of the fire. It is our promise as government, as political leaders and as society to ensure these people are well taken care of and their rights observed."

Lesego Holele  
Executive Mayor  
South Africa  
Ditsobotla Local Municipality

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