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**Commissioner
for Children**

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Three Western Cape child human rights defenders address the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child in Geneva, Switzerland on the lived realities of children in South Africa.

Three child human rights defenders from the Western Cape have been given the opportunity to address the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and advocate for the rights of children in their province and country.

Rushaan Abdol (15), Solakha Noyi (16), and Ruan Klaase (16) are Child Government Monitors and Advisors in the Western Cape Commissioner for Children's office. They are advocates for child rights realisation. Their advocacy is a testament to their dedication and commitment to improving the lives of children.

The children's meeting at the UNCRC is a platform for children to amplify their voices and call for action from government on issues affecting children. Rushaan, Solakha and Ruan will also lobby for these concerns to inform recommendations to the State by the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child is a body of child rights experts established by the United Nations. It monitors the progress of States in fulfilling their obligations to children's rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The three equally excited children have demonstrated exceptional ability and determination in defending children's rights, making them ideal representatives for the children of our province at an international level.

Commissioner Christina Nomdo says the three eloquent Child Government Monitors presented their lived realities of children in South Africa, to the UNCRC. She says their poignant stories highlighted their advocacy issues in relation to mental health services for children, child hunger, violence against children, discrimination, children as agents of change in their society calling for the voting age to decrease to 16 and for the establishment of a National Children's Commissioner.

"Their posters and presentations contained recommendations to government for change. The Commissioner and staff, child government monitors, mentors and alumni are incredibly proud and grateful to them for representing the Western Cape Commissioner for Children exceptionally well, she says.

Rushaan Abdol, 15, from Worcester

Rushaan Abdol's involvement with the WCCC began when she responded to a survey about #LearninginCOVIDtimes in February 2021. Since then, she has advanced to become an advisor to the Commissioner and has had the opportunity to participate in initiatives focusing on government budget monitoring training, strategic litigation, and interacting with child activists from other countries. In October 2022, she presented at an oral hearing of Provincial Parliament on the Children's Amendment Bill and presented at a conference on children's rights and democracy hosted by Play Africa at Constitutional Hill.

She feels a responsibility to improve children's conditions and is honoured to represent the WCCC and the children of South Africa. Rushaan says her involvement has developed her social consciousness and is laying a foundation for her to become a better citizen.

"My involvement in the WCCC has highlighted my responsibility to improve children's conditions in any way I can. Therefore, being selected to represent children is a big honour and I'm looking forward to making our little South African voices count on an international platform, as we continue to fight to realise all children's rights," she says.

Solakha Noyi, 16, from Kwanokuthula, Plettenberg Bay

Solakha Noyi joined the WCCC after attending a Community Child Rights workshop at Plettenberg Bay Secondary School in 2021. She has since been promoted to an advisor and a travel ambassador. She facilitated a partnership between the WCCC, the Speaker of Bitou Municipality, and the Bitou Junior Town Council to involve children in local governance decisions. She participated in three government budget monitoring training workshops. At these workshops, Solakha says her knowledge of local government budgeting processes was broadened beyond the horizon. Last year, she travelled to Maseru in Lesotho, where she presented at 40th Ordinary session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

Solakha says, "It's an amazing opportunity where South African children's voices can be raised on an international level. Over the moon would be an understatement, I am extremely excited, and I just cannot wait for the journey that lies ahead,".

"Njengomntana ohlala kwiphondo lase Ntshona Kapa, eMzantsi Afrika, amathuba anje ngalana anqabe kakhulu, kungoko ndiye ndalamkela ngezandla zombini elithuba. Ndiyabulela kakhulu kuMkomishinala Wabantwana ngelithuba kwaye ndifuna

ukukhuthaza bonke abantwana kwiphondo ukuba banawo amandla okwenza umahluko kwaye namaphupha wabo angafezeka," Solakha says.

Ruan Klaase, 16, from Rietpoort, Matzikama

In October 2020, Ruan attended one of the first WCCC Community Child Rights workshops in the Matzikama Municipality, where he met the Commissioner. As a CGM, he has been fortunate to participate in various initiatives such as strategic planning, government budget monitoring, and leadership workshops and the ACERWC meeting in Lesotho. Ruan expressed his enthusiasm for the trip.

Ruan says "Dit beteken vir my baie, omdat ek is die verkoose kind deur die Kommissaris is vir die Matzikama groep. As dit nie vir die Kommissaris was nie, sou ek nie met die UNCRC, AU en National Parlement kon praat nie."

"It means a lot to me to be the child chosen by the Commissioner to represent the Matzikama group. If not for the Commissioner, I would not be able to speak with the UNCRC, AU and National Parliament," he says.

Ends.

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About the Western Cape Commissioner for Children:

The Western Cape Commissioner for Children is an independent governance institution in the Western Cape. The Commissioner is mandated to protect and promote the rights, needs and interests of children in the province by working with the departments of Education, Health, Social Development as well as Cultural Affairs and Sport. The Commissioner for Children reports to Provincial Parliament on activities, functions and progress on objectives.