

OPINION AND LETTERS

The Times

The government is failing generations of our children

FORMER president Nelson Mandela once said: "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world."

But, as can be seen in The Times today, the government appears unconcerned that it is not arming this nation's children with the necessary weapons to secure their futures.

Instead, as we found out at Rutandale Primary in Limpopo, the health and safety of schoolchildren is in danger after the collapse of a block of pit latrines last year.

Ablution and sanitation facilities are basic needs. In urban, middle-class South Africa and its schools, it is unthinkable that young children might be exposed to such dangers — never mind that they might have to use old exercise books as toilet paper.

These and other depressingly negative statistics are not restricted to one province either. In fact, it is only the Western Cape and Gauteng that appear to have escaped some of the

It is black children whose futures are chained to ineptitude

DNA database would protect citizens against re-offenders

FEW events could highlight the significance and severity of parliament's failure to pass DNA database legislation than the impending release of 35 000 prisoners due to overcrowding.

If the government had performed its duty years ago, when the technical capacity for such a database was initially developed in South Africa, the release of the 35 000 criminals would be accompanied by the most effective mechanism known to identify those criminals should they commit new offences.

Instead, because of the government's failure to enable police to take DNA profiles from convicted offenders, the criminals have been released with little opportunity to protect the public when they do that which is most likely, namely re-offend.

DNA databases legislated in more than 44 countries worldwide are the most effective crime-fighting tools available to law enforcement.

They have proven to not only identify the most heinous criminals, but have also served to exonerate those wrongly

arrested and convicted.

In the US alone, DNA has exonerated more than 200 wrongfully convicted people. When individuals are convicted and sent to jail, their DNA profile (not their actual DNA, but a digitalised representation of their DNA) is put into a database that can be searched when other crimes are committed.

When these individuals are released, if they commit crimes again, they can be caught quickly and more reliably than ever before.

South Africa is about to be

hit with a wave of newly released criminals. Statistically, given what research tells us about the rate at which criminals reoffend, thousands of people will commit new crimes. Because of the government's failure to act, South Africa will be unprotected by the best technology available.

South Africans have just been given 35 000 more reasons to ask government to finally pass the DNA database legislation and make them safer. — Mogau Mabapa, Tshwane

BIG ISSUE | ON PROTECTING OUR CHILDREN



YOUR SMS COMMENTS

How can pregnancies among pupils be reduced?