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## National

Posted to the web on: 19 January 2007

# Appeal to stop flow of liquor to schoolchildren

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Education Correspondent



E-Mail article



Print-Friendly

DRINKING spots near schools were urged yesterday to close their doors during school hours, in a move aimed at reducing violence and abuse in South African schools.

A meeting between the Young Communist League and the South African Liquor Traders Association (Salta) resolved to appeal to taverners and shebeen-owners not to sell liquor to pupils and teachers.

The move is an attempt to tackle the national problem of pupils skipping school and of teachers teaching while under the influence of alcohol, said the league's Buti Manamela.

The two organisations have urged liquor traders to not allow pupils and teachers access to their taverns, pubs and shebeens. They have also called on teachers and pupils not to go drinking, saying it "interfered with learning and teaching".

Salta resolved also to consult its 250000 members nationwide on whether it would be feasible to close down, or relocate, drinking holes that were near schools, said the association's president, Saint Madlala.

Underage drinking was a problem in all sectors of South African society, said Frani van Rooyen, assistant director of the South African Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence.

Salta's move has been praised by Prof Charles Parry, director of the Medical Research Council's Alcohol and Drug Abuse Research Unit. "It's great when community-orientated groups get involved in campaigns like this. They can achieve quite a lot and it is so much more powerful when it comes from the community and not just some piece of legislation that gets passed."

The new campaign could have a good effect — drinking spots owned by Salta members constitute a large slice of the country's R28,8bn liquor market. A similar Salta campaign in the Johannesburg city centre had had a good effect, said Madlala.

In 2005, Salta members agreed to close their drinking spots in the Bank City area at 11pm instead of the legal 2am because police statistics showed that alcohol-related crime was high in the area. "It made quite a difference, so there is already a precedent," Madlala said.

Parry said the most recent statistics on alcohol use among children of school-

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going age were in the 2002 National Youth Risk Behaviour Survey, conducted among 10699 youths aged 11 to 20 from across SA.

A third of children under the age of 13 had used alcohol one or more times and this figure rose to 56% for 17-year-olds, according to the survey. While this could be anything from a child having a glass of wine with his or her parents at Christmas to binge drinking, the problem of alcohol abuse among youngsters was definitely on the increase, said Parry.



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The survey showed that 23% of the youths had been involved in binge drinking — consuming five or more drinks on one occasion.

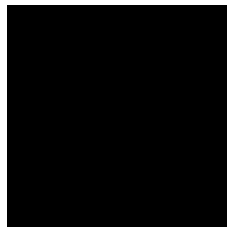
“We accept that there is an underage drinking problem out there ... but that does not mean that the liquor consumed by schoolchildren comes from shebeens or taverns,” said Madlala.

Alcohol was more easily available now as a child could buy a beer from a supermarket, and at a price far lower than what was charged at a shebeen, he said.

“Also, the department of education needs to put its foot down. I drive around and see kids milling about in the streets at 9am, and the teacher walking slowly to school without a guilty conscience,” he said.

Manamela said communities should report vendors who allowed pupils and teachers alcohol in school hours. The problem was not only a township one, and was worse in city centres.

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