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Mourners pay tribute to victims who lost lives in school bus crash

Memorial service for six pupils who died when train hit scholar transport

By **Mandla Khoza**

"She would encourage me and say that as leaders, we [she and I] must also help the class to do well."

This is how a grade 11 pupil paid tribute to her classmate Nomfundo Sibanyoni who died in a bus and train accident in Mpumalanga, last week.

A memorial service was held for the six pupils who died after a bus carrying 30 schoolchildren from Morelig Combined School in Wonderfontein outside Middelburg was hit by a train at a level crossing.

The Railway Safety Regulator's preliminary investigation this week revealed that the driver of the school bus appears to have not adhered to the road signage at the level crossing.

Speaking at the memorial service yesterday, pupil Karabo Mashego described Nomfundo as smart.

"This is painful. She liked to do things on time and she would handle matters in class with better understanding.

"She said she wanted to go to Cape Town and study law after finishing school."

She described what it felt like to walk into their classroom, a day after the accident. "When we entered the classroom, her seat was empty. It left all of us with grief," said Karabo.

Emotions ran high as relatives and pupils cried uncontrollably as the names of six victims were read out.

The others are Nomfundo's sibling Sinenhlanhla, Prudence Dimpho Masina, Joseph Innocent Mabena, Katlego Tshwarelo Majutle and Sbusiso Thulani Mokonehi.

Provincial MEC for public works, roads and transport Thulasizwe Thomo told the mourners: "This is painful. Parents wait to be buried by their children not what we see here where parents are burying their children.

"We will conduct our own investigation and if the driver is found [to be in the] wrong, we want the law to take its cause."

Selinah Mtshweni, who lost her grandchild Katlego, said the family is devastated. "I would walk them to the bus and wait for them in the afternoon and if they arrived late I would be worried.

"Now one of them didn't come back home, we are very pained as a family," said Mtshweni.

Transnet's general manager of communication, Litha Mcwambeni, said they were trying by all means possible to educate the community about level crossings and safety.



Family members of the six pupils who died in a train and scholar transport bus crash crying at the memorial service yesterday. /MANDLA KHOZA