

Fiery Debaters Argue Water Rights

Solvista Secondary's senior debate team is currently ranked 8th out of 293 teams in the world in the Global Debate.

The debaters are participating in The People Speak Global Debate, which is an educational campaign, designed to engage young people on issues that shape their future. The Global Debate requires teams to debate two motions. The first motion was on effective ways of reducing carbon emissions.

Solvista is ranked 8th position after the first round. The results for the second and final round are expected later in the year. The second round was held on 12 March at Spes Nova Hall before an audience of over 200 specially invited guests and the teams debated whether water should be considered national property. Team Affirmative (Jolene Duleep and Renita Balgobind) argued that the South African government has a moral obligation and the capacity to provide fresh and clean water to all its citizens. The Negative Team (Justina Chetty and Tiffany Chetty) disagreed and felt that the solution to

water poverty was to privatize water. The debaters attracted the attention of several governmental and private water utilities. The debate was hosted by Umgeni Water; eThekweni Water and Sanitation; KZN Agriculture and Environmental Affairs; Department of Water Affairs and Forestry; Umgeni River Bird Park and private water company Siza water. Several schools from all over the province were invited to be part of the global audience. Jolene Duleep, who obtained her South African colours in debates in 2007, opened the debate by declaring that the South African government had a moral obligation and responsibility to provide water as part of its social contract. She said, "Privatization is a new form of apartheid that separates the rich from the poor!" Justina Chetty countered that government had failed to provide proper and adequate water and sanitation effectively and efficiently. The debaters were then allowed to cross examine each others arguments. The audience was allowed to serve as the judges. Renita Balgobind, also one of the top ranked South African debaters, attacked the privatization of water utilities, "Privatization is a tool that only serves to compound the suffering of the

waterless as the priority is profits rather than access."

Tiffany Chetty concluded the debate by quoting statistics to prove that privatization would increase access. The audience was allowed to question the four debaters on the validity of their policies. In a fiery exchange, Renita challenged representatives of private water company Siza on the effectiveness of their role in reducing water poverty.

The debaters are now working on a service learning project where they are investigating the impact of water poverty on education in KZN- the number of schools that do not have water; number of pupils absent as a result of water borne illnesses; number of female pupils who drop out of schools because of their responsibility to fetch water for their families. They hope to work with the various stakeholders to provide a water tank to an impoverished school within the Mafukezela-Gandhi circuit. They were delighted to receive a positive response from eThekweni Water and Sanitation to provide a water tank to the school. The debate teams are coached by Mrs S Kooblal, a member of the South African Schools' Debating Board and Mrs K Naidu.

