In the freedom charter, the document which kept the fire of freedom alive, there was a promise. A promise that the doors of learning would be opened. A promise that each child would have an opportunity to see possibility. In South Africa, while the laws entrenched by the Apartheid government were visually about segregation and exploitation, the biggest task which the regime sought to achieve was to oppress the minds of the people. Steven Bantu Biko once said, ‘the most powerful weapon of the oppressor, is the mind of the oppressed’.

They did this, through education. The Bantu Education Act ensured that Black South Africans
could not aspire to greatness, could be nothing more than cheap fuel for the machine of Apartheid. How right they were. Today we have a nation of people who still suffer from an inferiority complex. As a young girl, I read books about discovery, books about tribulation, books about triumph, fantastic books and the most important were books about my consciousness. Even when I found myself in a world which thought I could amount to nothing, I remembered that there was a world out there. I remembered that a young girl caught in the grip of a war could live forever through her stories. I read that a woman with a passion for her culture could ignore societal norms and achieve her goals, fill her desires. I read of the behavior of the oppressed and understood my circumstances.

If I never had an opportunity to learn to read and write, I never would have known that there are other answers to the challenges we face. I would never have known of my right to choose as a woman, I never would have known about the importance of my intuition. Without books, and the exposure to knowledge found between two covers, would I have
found comfort in believing? Would I have been the determined, head strong young woman I have become?

Two basic skills changed the trajectory of my being. My intuition coupled with the writings of Sobukwe, Biko, Coelho, Allende, Achebe, and Angelou took the shackles that gripped my mind and shattered them. Finally free.

As a young leader I have always wanted to share this freedom with my peers. I have worked with young people in rural schools who thought it true that ‘white people were smarter than black people’, pupils that thought they could never be greater in life. It seems the legacy of apartheid lives on even today, 15 years after our first democratic election. Education is a powerful tool and weapon. Today I pledge my life to being a positive force behind education as a weapon against illiteracy and oppression and as a tool for building a better tomorrow.

Positive education encourages reading. Reading everything, reading stories about eccentric dictators,
chauvinists, feminist activists, extremists, comedians, historians, legends and polka dot butterflies. As we fought for our freedom, beyond the armour and the bullets, the architects of this freedom we strive for, knew that the key was education. As a reader myself and an activist in education I know the enemy of freedom is illiteracy. A world that still has a desire to oppress, a desire to exercise power over another is a world that will ensure that the global levels of illiteracy never change. I don’t live in that world. I live in a place that is ‘alive with possibility’, I have read of endless horizons, limitless skies and know that my voice sounds this alarm for education for all.

The freedom charter still lives in my heart because I have read what was written before my birth and understand the task ahead. Oppression is a simple action, but freedom is a journey, will you walk with me?