

SPEECH BY THE FREE STATE MEC FOR SPORTS, ARTS, CULTURE AND RECREATION, MR DAN KGOHULE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE PROVINCIAL LAUNCH OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN INDIGENOUS CLASSIC BOOKS IN CELEBRATION OF INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY, BLOEMFONTEIN

8 September 2009

Programme director
Honoured guests
Ladies and gentlemen
Comrades

Today we are celebrating International Literacy Day to mark the importance of reading and writing in the life of any citizen. As we all know September 8 was proclaimed International Literacy Day by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on 17 November 1965. It was first celebrated in 1966. Its aim is to highlight the importance of literacy to individuals, communities and societies. This is a world wide celebration.

The challenge that we are sitting with is that some 776 million adults lack minimum literacy skills, one in five adults is still not literate and two-thirds of them are women, 75 million children are out of school and many more attend irregularly or drop out. It is for this reason that we as government and Free State provincial in particular, are going out of our way to ensure that rural children are having access to schools through the distribution of bicycles that should be used to ride to school instead of walking kilometres back and forth

Many local municipality councillors who attended that meeting made earnest request for libraries to be build within their communities. I must however indicate that we have redefined our concept of what constitutes a community library. In my budget vote policy statement this year we stated that, and I quote: "Certainly, a library is no longer simply a building which provides access to books and other printed material. Community libraries need to reflect the dynamics of the information age. Multi media and internet facilities as well as language laboratories and sufficient computer equipment must be integral features of our community libraries".

This means that from now on our approach to the building of libraries should be different. We need to ensure that our libraries must cater for the reading and studying needs of learners within communities. 1 000 learners within a specific community should be able to utilise a library for studying and other learning related activities.

The work we have done so far is good and it needs to be taken to the next level which I have just outlined now. The fact that the two new libraries that we have just completed and opened to the public, that is Selosesha Public Library in Thaba-Nchu and the Ntai Mokoena Library in Refengkgotso, have a well developed collections of information resources in a variety of formats and also an information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure which provides online access to electronic information to the public, means that we have a foundation to build on.

Programme director, this year we are using this occasion to also highlight the importance of indigenous classic books. In our quest to promote reading and writing amongst our citizens we deemed it fit as government to drive a campaign about indigenous languages and books. It is our firm view that if we encourage mother tongue education, reading and writing the majority of our people will be encouraged to develop interest in books.

It is my understanding that the National Library of South Africa has been mandated to look into the task of reissuing indigenous language literacy classic books which are out of print to contribute to the promotion of the culture of reading and writing. As the Free State we are delighted to have received the following indigenous classic books from the National Library:

- * Mehlolo ke di noha, by SP Lekeba: 475 copies
- * Sankatana, by SM Mofokeng
- * Mathloko, by RM Malope
- * Motimedi, by DP Moloto
- * Buzani ku Bawo, by WK Thamsanqa
- * Elundini lothukela, by JJR Jolobe
- * Ingqumbu Yeminyanya, by AC Jordan
- * Ityala lamawele, by SEK Mqhayi
- * Ubulumko bezinja, by R Siyongwana
- * Imiyalezo, by MJ Mngadi
- * Kunyenyeza esikhotheni, by G Elliot
- * Inkinsela yasemgungundlovu

The task of reproducing these books is an important task because not only do we promote reading and writing through such books, but we also enhance the preservation of a cultural heritage. The reproduction of Sesotho classic books such as Mehlolo ke dinoha, Sankatana, Matlhoko and so on will in no doubt inculcate an idea of African and South African indigenous language as well as writing heritage. We are grateful for the contribution of this collection and I have no doubt that it will be put to good use.

Honoured guests, may I take this opportunity to appreciate the good work that is being done by librarians in the province. We are well aware of the personnel and other challenges that are confronting us and give my undertaking that we will work day and night to ensure that these are addressed.

I thank you.