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THIS WEEK:

- * Letter from the President: Our Languages matter!
- * The National Schools Pledge: A commitment to uphold the Bill of Rights
- * The National Schools: A common heritage of humanity

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Our Languages matter!

On February 21, the world will celebrate International Mother Language Day, to promote the linguistic and cultural diversity. This year's celebration is special because the United Nations General Assembly has proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages, under the theme "Languages Matter!".

In his message on the celebration, the Director General of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), Koïchiro Matsuura appeals for the importance of linguistic diversity and multilingualism to be acknowledged everywhere - in education, administrative and legal systems, in cultural expressions and in the media, cyberspace and trade. "Let all the members of the United Nations family, all the Member States, and partners and friends of UNESCO join together to show that "languages matter", he says.

The promotion of languages and celebration of our cultural diversity is held dearly by the African National Congress. This is because in addition to the national goal of liberation, attained with the democratic elections in 1994, the ANC has always sought to build a non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa, united in her diversity.

As we asserted in our Social Transformation Discussion Document ahead of the 52nd National Conference and beyond, the ANC recognises that we are at the beginning of a long journey to a truly united, democratic and prosperous South Africa, in which the value of all citizens is measured by their humanity, without regard to race, gender and social status. We said: "Inspired by the Freedom Charter and the principles enshrined in the Reconstruction and Development Programme, we continue unabated with our social transformation programme, informed by the democratic principles of the people-centred and people-driven state and a value system based on human solidarity. These pillars are the attributes of a caring society and it beckons us to forge a social compact - made up of all races - that has, as its central objective of social policy, the preservation and development of human resources, including our languages and ensuring social cohesion".

Primary among the objectives of building this equal and just society should be our collective determination to promote and celebrate our multiculturalism, which gives our country its unique identity.

There should be a renewed effort at all levels to promote multilingualism and the development of all official languages, including the South African Sign Language and the languages referred to in the South African Constitution. Our key institutions such as government or parliament should assist us to promote the right to diversity which is enshrined in our Constitution. Our Cabinet recently instructed all government departments to establish language units, so that information they produce can be made available to citizens in their mother tongues. We trust that departments are taking this executive directive seriously. Mass communication that is not done in all 11 languages cannot serve the purpose of adequately communicating to all South Africans. It is a challenge we must confront, and overcome.

Education is fundamental to the achievement of the society envisaged in the Freedom Charter. We have a responsibility to guide our children who are growing up in an increasingly cosmopolitan environment, to learn and speak as many of our official languages as possible. We have to ensure that they do not develop any contempt for their mother tongues, their communities of origin and their history.

Opportunities have come to the fore for such mother tongue promotion, such as the introduction of the new School Pledge and the launch of the new massive literacy drive soon. Children can be encouraged to develop a sense of pride in their country as well as in their languages if they also recite the School Pledge in different languages depending on the region.

We also would better serve the interests of the majority of South Africans, including our illiterate or semi-literate citizens, if we concentrate on strengthening their command of their mother tongues in addition to the skills of managing essential economic and social processes. But this task is not the responsibility of government alone. We all have a duty to promote our mother languages.

Our intelligentsia and authors could also begin to use mother tongues more as languages of intellectual engagement and publishing. We should be having books in our history being produced in mother tongues, for our history and heritage to be accessible to all our people. It means we must all also promote the reading of mother tongue literature in our country. There are classics in isiZulu by authors such as BW Vilakazi, Otty Nxumalo, CT Msimang and others, and in isiXhosa for example Ingqumbo yeminyanya by AC Jordan and several others. These are the types of books whose world will be shut forever to our youth who still have to be introduced to mother tongue literature.

Our print media too, should ideally be available in more languages, not just English and Afrikaans. It is a pity that a newspaper such as Imvo Zabantsundu was closed down. Other than its rich history, it would be playing a critical role of promoting mainstream reading and interaction in the isiXhosa language. KwaZulu-Natal appears to be the only province with a flourishing mother tongue media, with successful commercial titles such as UMAFRIKA, Ilanga and Isolezwe as well as several community papers in isiZulu. We need to replicate the formula in other provinces. Here is a challenge to our current and budding media owners! The market clearly exists; given the success of the existing publications.

As Matsuura points out: "Languages are absolutely vital to the identity of groups and individuals, and their peaceful coexistence. They are a strategic factor in advances

towards sustainable development and the harmonious coordination of the global and the local. Far from being a field reserved for analysis by specialists, languages lie at the heart of all social, economic and cultural life".

May I in advance then, wish all South Africans and nations of the world a Happy International Mother Language Day on the 21st.

Jacob G Zuma

<Viewpoint: Naledi Pandor>

THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS PLEDGE

A commitment to uphold the Bill of Rights

This week government released a proposed schools pledge and the public has been invited to comment on it.

The Star of 14 February 2008 captured the aim of the pledge the best:

"We had a wonderful new Constitution, but we never lived in its spirit, nor infused our own lives with its tenets. Which is why we say today that the [pledge] that is being proposed for all school pupils is something that should be welcomed. It represents an opportunity that we should grasp with both hands, if we are truly serious about forging a nation that is as rich in its diversity as it is in its unity".

The pledge is a commitment made by learners to uphold the Bill of Rights in the Constitution. The aim of reciting the pledge is to internalise those values we as South Africans have accepted as important. We agreed to enshrine these rights in our Constitution.

The first three lines of the pledge are based on the preamble to the Constitution, and the fourth line is a commitment to upholding the core value of dignity in the Bill of Rights. The remaining lines commit all who recite the pledge to uphold the rights granted in the Constitution and their associated duties and responsibilities.

This is the proposed pledge:

"We, the youth of South Africa,
Recognising the injustices of our past,
Honour those who suffered and sacrificed for justice and freedom.
We will respect and protect the dignity of each person and stand up for justice.
We sincerely declare that we shall uphold the rights and values of our Constitution,
and promise to act in accordance with the duties and responsibilities that flow from these rights.

! KE E / XARRA // KE

Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika."

Now compare the pledge to the preamble to the Constitution:

"We, the people of South Africa,
Recognise the injustices of our past;
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and
Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity."

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The similarities are clear.

It seems to me, from talking to young people, that these are universal values that you'd want any human being to believe in. We have an advanced Constitution that is routinely admired the world over, but the Bill of Rights in the Constitution contains a range of rights that you will find in slightly varying forms in most modern Constitutions.

In 1996 South Africa embraced the final Constitution. The schools pledge draws on our embrace. The pledge will play a role in drawing together the youth of South Africa in a shared sense of responsibility.

The pledge speaks very much to the values that we should all internalize and encourage our young people to take up as part of their core purpose in our society.

South Africa is an emerging nation, a society boldly building a new vision and identity. The schools pledge merges history and the future by briefly recalling the past and by presenting to young people a vision of a South Africa in which respect and dignity for all permeates all our actions.

It is encouraging to note the engaged manner in which many people have responded to the proposed pledge. We trust that the submissions will assist us to finalise the pledge soon.

** Naledi Pandor is the National Minister of Education

<Viewpoint: Mathole Motsekga>

THE NATIONAL SCHOOLS

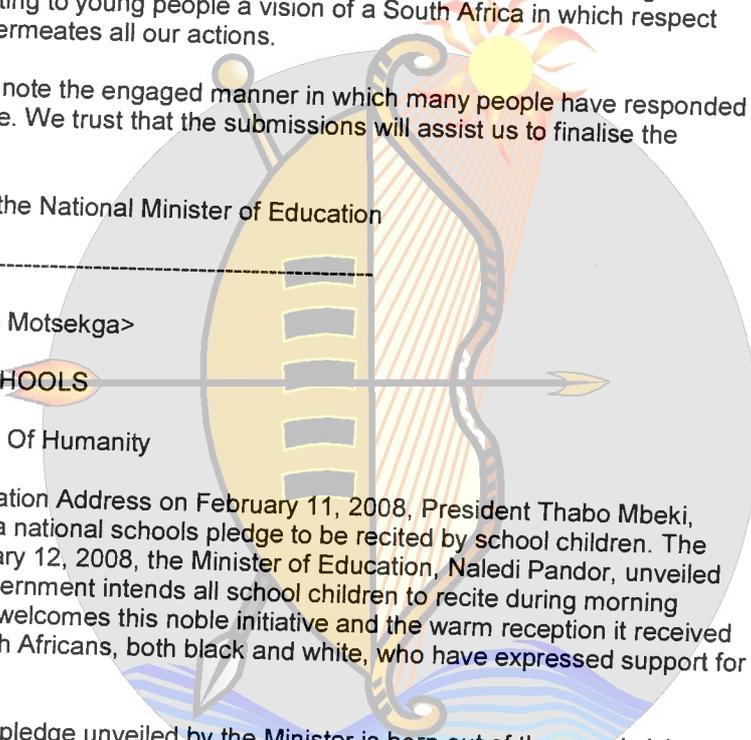
A Common Heritage Of Humanity

In his State-of-the-Nation Address on February 11, 2008, President Thabo Mbeki, raised the matter of a national schools pledge to be recited by school children. The following day, February 12, 2008, the Minister of Education, Naledi Pandor, unveiled a pledge that the government intends all school children to recite during morning assembly. The ANC welcomes this noble initiative and the warm reception it received from majority of South Africans, both black and white, who have expressed support for it.

The national schools pledge unveiled by the Minister is born out of the moral vision that guided the ANC over many years of struggle. It embodies principles and values which evolved over many centuries and become a common heritage of humanity. It is therefore important that we briefly highlight the historical background of this heritage and how it came to be part and parcel of our constitutional order.

The democratic breakthrough of 1994 opened the door for the pursuit of our strategic objective of creating a united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous society. This monumental task required us to search for common values for our diverse society. The task was made easier by our realisation and acknowledgement that South Africa and the African Continent is the Cradle of all humanity.

The human family segmented and dispersed to different continents. Over thousands of years, the human family was segmented and dispersed to different continents.



years segments of the human family that left the continents returned and a re-integration of humanity began. Thus many African nations, for instance, South Africa, are a product of many streams of history and culture. Our country, therefore, represents the origins, dispersal and re-integration of humanity.

The colonial and Apartheid education systems that we inherited denied us the true history and culture of humanity and the knowledge that humanity is essentially one. The archeological and paleontological evidence that show that humanity originated in Africa and it is one, finds support in the perennial philosophy of the African sage Khem, also known as Thoth-Hermes.

Lord Khem of Thoth-Hermes taught that a human being is both mortal and immortal because s/he is made of spiritual and material substances. The spiritual aspect of the human personality is the quintessential element that imbues it with its worth and dignity. The Khemetic or Hermetic text Imhotep (Greek Aescclapius) expressed the concept of human dignity in the maxim magnum miraculum homo est (i.e. (hu)man is the greatest miracle).

Ancient Greek, Jewish and Sufis (i.e. Islamic) philosophers were followers of Thoth-Hermes and they used Hermetic texts to found their own philosophies. Among the Jews Thoth-Hermes came to be known as Enoch and among the Moslems as Idris.

The twelfth-century Sufi philosopher Suhrawardi taught that all the ancient sages have followed a single perennial philosophy which is found at the heart of all religions. According to Suhrawardi this philosophy had come from the Egyptian Sage Thoth-Hermes. He identified this sage with the prophet called Idris in the Koran and Enoch in the Bible.

The arrival in fourteenth-century Florence, Italy, of Hermetic texts inspired the rebirth of spiritual humanism that led to an extraordinary flowering of arts and sciences known as the Renaissance (i.e. rebirth) which laid the foundation for the modern age. The resulting modern societies of Europe embarked on journeys of exploration to find raw materials, slave labour and colonies for exploitation.

The slave trade and colonialism by their nature jettisoned spirituality and human values inherited from Hermetism.

Wars of Conquests resulted in the subjugation of the African population, including the Khoi and the San who were subjected to genocidal campaigns, as well as Indian communities and slaves from Southeast Asia and other areas. Despite their heroic resistance, the African people were defeated in a series of wars that took place over two and half centuries of colonial expansion.

The Settler White communities also fought among themselves in the Anglo-Boer (now South African) war and later reached a political settlement that excluded Africans, Indians and Coloureds. The Settlement led to the formation of the Union of South Africa. The ANC was formed in 1912 to respond to this challenge.

In the ensuing struggle against this colonialism of a special type various sectors of society played a critical role. These sectors included workers, the rural masses, women, youth, students, the religious community, the intelligentsia, professionals etc. In the course of the struggle for Civil and political rights a new value informed by the 16th and 17th century philosophy of enlightenment was born.

The birth of a new value

The birth of a new value

The South African colonial system was based on the intersection of relations of power based on class, race and gender. These social and biological features were used to exclude, repress and arrest the development of the potential of individuals and communities. This deliberate underdevelopment of people by others degraded and dehumanised black people while giving whites a sense of superiority complex. In this process black people lost their humanity.

After the formation of the ANC, the recovery of African humanity became the central feature of the struggle for freedom, equality and justice for all. The principle of humanity and its inherent values of freedom, equality and justice for all could be traced back to the Hermetic principles of equality, liberty and brotherhood which were adopted by the Freemasons and used to mobilize popular support in both the French and American Revolutions. The Haitian Revolutionaries and early Pan African leaders were inspired by the same values. Thus by the 19th and 20th Centuries these principles and values had become universal.

Human values in South Africa

The culture of human rights took shape for the first time in 1923 when the ANC National Conference adopted a Bill of Rights.

In its opening paragraph the Bill asserted the humanity of African people and their right to participate in the social and economic life of the country. In the 1930s Charlotte Manye-Maxeke claimed that women's rights were also human rights. At the same time the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) and the Trade Union Movement placed workers' rights high on the agenda.

During World War I and II Black people supported the Allied Forces hoping that in the event of victory, civil and political rights will also be extended to them. But in 1941 when Churchill and Roosevelt proclaimed the Atlantic Charter they failed to extend the right to self-determination and human rights to African and Asian peoples.

In 1948, the ANC adopted the African Claims which asserted its claim to these rights. The failure of the Allied forces to extend civil and political rights to African people most probably encouraged the Nationalist Party to rise to power on the platform of separate development or Apartheid in the same year. Apartheid degraded and dehumanised black people while giving whites a sense of superiority complex. In their process black people lost their humanity.

In 1955 the ANC adopted the Freedom Charter after extensive consultation with the people of South Africa. The Freedom Charter is probably the only Bill of Rights in the World which was developed and adopted by the people of a country as a whole. The humanity (Ubuntu/Botho) of all people and its inherent principles of equality, freedom and justice for all underlies the Freedom Charter.

The mobilisation of the people around Freedom Charter and its underlying principles and values made the democratic breakthrough of 1994 possible. These principles and values found their way into the opening paragraph of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights. The national schools pledge unveiled by the minister is, informed by and reflects human values, rights and responsibilities which evolved over hundreds of years.

Substantive content of the Pledge

The injustices referred to in the pledge can be traced back to the slave trade and wars of conquests which took place during the 17th and 18th century, colonialism and

Apartheid and the resulting wars of national liberation. In the slave revolts and all subsequent wars all South Africans, both black and white, suffered injustices while others sacrificed their lives and property for justice and freedom.

In the pledge, the youth recalls and recognises the injustices of the past and honor those who fought for freedom and victims of the past slave revolts and wars. This recognition serves to instill the virtues of peace, love and adherence of conflict and violence among the youth.

The youth makes an undertaking to respect and protect the humanity (i.e. dignity of each person) of all South Africans. This humanity is the source of all human and people's rights for which thousands of people sacrificed their properties and lives. Thus the Pledge cultivates human (Ubuntu/Botho) principles and values in the youth and commit them to fight against injustice wherever it rears its ugly head.

The values and rights embodied in the Constitution of the Republic of South African and international human rights instruments derive from the humanity (Ubuntu/Botho) of all human beings, both black and white. Similarly, the duties and responsibilities of the youth derive from the humanity of all. The undertaking or commitment of the youth to uphold the rights and values of our constitution and to act in accordance with the duties and responsibilities that flow from them is an affirmation of the humanity of all, black and white, by the youth. This instills the virtues of peace and security in young people.

The values and rights of our constitution and the rights and responsibilities that flow from them are the cornerstones of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights. The universality of the values and rights will serve to inculcate the principles of internationalism in young people.

The national schools pledge is not a dogma that is rammed down the throats of South African youth. It is a sum total of Human Rights and Values born out of freedom struggles and the human quest for peace and security. The pledge should be strengthened by the incorporation of character building and human rights education in both formal and non-formal educational programmes.

** Prof Mathole Motshekga is a member of the ANC National Executive Committee

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