

## On indigenous reading development programme launch

26 June 2009

Speech by the Executive Mayor of Johannesburg, Councillor Amos Masondo, on the occasion of the African Literature book shop and the indigenous reading development programme launch, 191 Louis Botha Avenue, Ground Floor, FNB Building, Orange Grove – Johannesburg

Programme Director:

Speaker of Council: Clr Nkele Ntingane

Chief Whip of Council: Nonceba Molwele

MMC for Community Development: Clr Bafana Sithole

Members of the Mayoral Committee

Fellow Councillors

Managers and Officials

The Greater Orange Groove Community

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Programme Director, like most who are gathered here this morning, I feel greatly honoured and privileged to be part of this occasion – the launch of the African Literature Book Shop and the Indigenous Reading Development Programme.

Reading is important; it is a means of language acquisition, of communication and of sharing information and ideas.

According to the Institutional Management and Governance Planning (Western Cape Education Department) adult illiteracy level is estimated to be 3.3 million in South Africa.

Programme Director, I believe that this launch will make a significant contribution to the development of African Literature, help promote a culture of reading as well as enhance our Indigenous languages.

The development of indigenous reading (and by implication an African Literature Bookshop) depends on the availability of suitable literature in indigenous languages. The shortage of reading material in indigenous languages and the absence of reading public places in indigenous languages have been a hindrance to the development of African literature.

In his keynote address at the Gala Cultural Evening of the World Library and Information Congress in Durban, in 2007, the then Minister of Arts and Culture, Z. Pahlam Jordan, lamented over the fact that the South African society "is not a society of readers" and "worse yet there is neither enough literature in indigenous languages".

In May 2008 he addressed an audience at the Commonwealth Writers' Prize Giving Ceremony in Franschhoek and stated that "Undeniably, there has been a significant growth in the publishing industry, with a galaxy of new writers being published, but engendering critical mass audiences for South African literature remains a major challenge. Books in indigenous languages are even more disadvantaged".

Following the above statements, the Indigenous Literature Publishing Project was launched on a national scale. It is aimed at publishing books in different languages by writers from different ethnic groups and backgrounds. One of its objectives is to stimulate indigenous literature and ensure a growth and development of indigenous literature. The National Library of South Africa was also tasked to republish out-of-print African language classics this on its own marks an important milestone on this matter.

BiblionefSA one of the City's supporters commissioned the publication of fifty (50) titles in the eleven (11) national languages and donated nearly four hundred thousand books to various institutions in its first eight years of existence. The National Library of South Africa's Centre of the Book also distributed the "First Words in Print" literature through various institutions, including public libraries.

These efforts have been supported by the Department of Arts and Culture (DAC) in collaboration with the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) whose partnership with the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) gave birth in 2007 to the first annual edition of Writing in nine tongues: a catalogue of literature and readers in nine African languages for South Africa which promotes access to books in indigenous languages.

The Publishers' Association of South Africa annual industry surveys indicate that the local publishing industry is dominated by the sale of English-language books ( $\pm 70\%$ ), followed by the sale of books published in Afrikaans ( $\pm 18\%$ ) with books published in the nine African languages combined accounting for an average of nine percent (9%) of Net Turnover.

Of an average of four hundred and fifty (450) original and new edition trade fiction titles published per annum by participating publishers, an average of forty percent (40%) are (in) English, forty seven percent (47%) Afrikaans and six percent (6%) in the rest of the indigenous languages.

Looking at these figures, it appears as if publishing and demand in indigenous languages remains small. With the former in mind, both commercial and developmental/subsidised approaches to the establishment of an African Literature Bookshop were explored.

This facility will be supported by activities of the existing African Literary Development Programme as well as by initiating a new reading development programme to stimulate reading in indigenous languages for the age group of five to nine

(year olds).

The main objective of this bookshop is to popularise literature, programmes and writers that highlight information about Africa in general and South Africa in particular in all eleven official languages, and by so doing, raise awareness, foster cultural pride and community empowerment.

In addition our other objectives are:

To support, inspire and expose South African writers and to create interest in writing in indigenous languages;

To increase public knowledge of African history and culture, so as to foster pride and integration, and

To develop the talent of the youth who participate in the African Literary Development Programme and to guide them towards the world of publishing through the Centre of the Book.

This African Literature Book Shop, echoes the eighth clause of the Freedom Charter that states "The doors of learning and culture shall be opened,... all the cultural treasures of mankind shall be open to all, by free exchange of books, ideas and contact with other lands".

The target market of this venture is:

Urban and young people (25 - 45 years: intellectually and culturally inclined);

Lifestyle conscious people who have some awareness of health and alternative cultures;

Artists, poets, writers and people within cultural sectors;

To reach audience that are not particularly interested in books through outreach programmes, events, workshops and seminars in communities;

The initial activities of the bookshop/outlet will be mostly concentrated on events and outreach (book launches, presentations, discussions, book clubs, workshops on promoting of indigenous languages). The adjacent Migrants Information Desk will also feed inter-cultural exchange programmes.

It is envisaged that book suppliers will also be approached to display their stock in African indigenous languages and books about Africa.

To all present today, I believe that even if this venture is going to start small, in time it will become a force to be reckoned with in the quest by the City of Johannesburg to promote African Literature and Indigenous languages.

I have no doubt that this facility will grow to become one of the most important Book Shops of its kind in the country.

Thank you