

## Walkabout at the Johannesburg City Library

14 November 2011

Speech by the Executive Mayor of the City of Johannesburg, Clr Mpho Parks Tau, on the occasion of the Walkabout at the Johannesburg City Library, Inner City – Johannesburg

Programme Director

MMC for Community Development: Clr Chris Vondo

Members of the Mayoral Committee

Fellow Councillors

City Manager: Mr Trevor Fowler

Carnegie Corporation of New York Programme Director of Higher Education and Libraries in Africa: Dr Tade Aina

Carnegie Corporation of New York Programme Officer of Higher Education and Libraries and Manager of African Libraries: Dr Rookaya Bawa

Managers and Officials

Members of the Community

Distinguished Guests

The Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

PROGRAMME Director, we are delighted to be part of this important occasion. It is comforting to see the Johannesburg City Library coming back to life.

Neal Petersen, a South African yachtsman who was the first black person to sail solo around the world. He went global at his little local library on the Cape Flats when he discovered sailing and the art of navigation through books. Neal testifies that "books are about more than having access to information; it is about what one does with that information and where it can take you".

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, looking back at the history of the Johannesburg City Library area and seeing this beautiful Precinct and facility, one gets a feeling of satisfaction and pride.

Please let me give you a brief background of this Library. The Johannesburg City Library is one of the oldest and established Libraries in South Africa. It opened its doors on 06 August 1935 and it is the successor to two earlier buildings, the Old Church Building used from 1893 to 1898 and the Kerk Street Library built in 1898. As was the practice at the time, those were subscription libraries, only those who could afford to pay the fees could become members and users. At a rowdy meeting in 1923 and despite some fierce opposition, the subscribers agreed to transfer the Library to the Town Council so that it would become a free lending library. It was the first major library in South Africa to do so.

The construction of Johannesburg Public Library was from 1931-1935 and was as a result of an architectural competition won by the Cape Town based architect, John Perry (1875-1943). It was the first public library in South Africa to open its doors to all races in 1974.

As is the case of the building, the contents are invaluable and represent many years of hard work, dedication and knowledge. Above all, its major contribution to librarianship is the outstanding collection of books for study and research. The Michaelis Art library, the Performing Arts library, the Strange Library of African Studies (Africana Collection) and the Children's Book Collection are examples of exceptional specialist collections that were enriched by special collections/donations that were incorporated over the years. The general collections are of very high standard, especially the Reference, Young Adults Reference and the Multimedia collections.

A conservative estimate of the value of the more than one million books (some very rare) and other items is R600 million. The book stock and other resources are housed in the library as well as in an additional basement and stack areas totaling  $\pm 10\,900\text{m}^2$ . A large portion of the stack area is situated under the parking garage between Market and President Street.

This Library 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".

Programme Director, it goes without saying, that the City alone and in isolation cannot sustain its infrastructure investment, it will take the community, private sector, organisations of civil society and government partnerships to expand existing initiatives and find new and innovative ways to accelerate service delivery.

Our sincere appreciation goes out to our partners Carnegie Corporation of New York (CCNY), who contributed R27million towards this project.

The funding provided for the following:

- the appointment and training of staff to weed the specialised reference collections of irrelevant, unused, out-of-date and worn materials,
- the linking of the remaining stock of the specialised collections to the data base,
- subscribing to electronic databases,
- purchasing and linking of new stock, and
- purchasing of audio-visual equipment and equipment for the digitisation of the library's news-cuttings-collection.

Programme Director, the approval of the grant funding by the Carnegie was based on an agreement with the City to provide the capital funds for the upgrading/extension of the Library and the provision of operational funds to sustain the projects. The City of Johannesburg provided R67, 5 million towards the upgrading of the library.

Ladies and Gentlemen, allow me to congratulate Carnegie for choosing the City of Johannesburg for their Revitalizing of African Libraries Programme. For making Johannesburg City Library a Centre of Excellence or a 21st Century Model City Library as per their strategic plan.

Let me take this opportunity on behalf of the Johannesburg Council, its residents and citizens to thank the Carnegie Corporation of New York for not only funding this project but for their guidance and support from 2005 when this project began.

We would also like to thank Mr Jonathan Stone, the Heritage Architect for attending to the professional needs of the library services as well as the preservation and restoration needs of the building.

Many thanks to Fikile Construction for meeting the demands of an exceptional project.

Last but not least, I wish to thank the MMC for Community Department as well as the Executive Director and the Community Development staff.

With the completion of the upgrading/extension of the building and the commitment of the Carnegie to the provision of relevant information, a centralised and complete database of all the collections and the provision of IT, we are now looking forward to opening the library to the public on 14 February 2012.

Programme Director, I would like to urge the residents and citizens of Johannesburg to use this facility to their maximum benefit and to also protect and look after it and the contents in this library.

Allow me to conclude by emphasising that government continues to strive for and remain committed to a vision of a better life for all.

Thank you