

## MEC Speech for the opening of Zamani Library

This year we celebrate 25 years of democracy under the theme “Building a Better Africa and a Better World”. This is an opportunity to promote African unity, deeper regional integration and recommit Africa to a common destiny. We can only do that by embracing ourselves as Africans through the preservation of our culture and heritage, history and through speaking and protecting our indigenous languages.

Languages play a crucial role in our daily lives. They are not only our first medium for communication, education and social integration, but are also at the heart of each person’s unique identity, cultural history and memory. But despite their immense value, languages around the world continue to disappear at an alarming rate. With this in mind, the United Nations declared 2019 The Year of Indigenous Languages in order to raise awareness of them, not only to benefit the people who speak these languages, but others to appreciate the important contribution they make to our world’s rich cultural diversity.

I would like to acknowledge and give credit to Ms. Norah Ngobeni for the letter she wrote on 12 February 2015, to the president of the country who by then was the deputy president His Excellency Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa. Ms. Ngobeni was working as an OPD Librarian in Mpumalanga when she wrote a letter requesting a library for this community of Nkuri. She wrote the letter after seeing him encouraging Khayelitsha residence to make use of Public Libraries. Today Ms. Norah Ngobeni is working at this very same library as a Librarian.

Our visit to Zamani here today to officially open this library represents a society visualized in the National Development Plan wherein each community has:

- A school
- Teachers who love teaching and learning
- A local library filled with a wealth of knowledge
- A librarian

The goals of the National Development Plan, contribute to the improvement of quality of life in South Africa by developing and sustaining the library and information service which will promote and inform an information-literate citizenry who can participate meaningfully in a democratic and knowledge-based society.

As the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, we are committed to the preservation, development and promotion of South African literature in all its forms and genres. These initiatives are augmented by the presence of library infrastructure in the various communities.

We will continue to build libraries in communities that have limited access or do

not have access at all to these facilities, and upgrade other existing structures. Libraries and a reading culture are of strategic importance to socio-economic growth and development.

Construction work for four more libraries in Runnymede, Mavalani, Dumela and Seleteng is underway as we speak. The department has in this financial year set aside R90 million for this state of art libraries. The department will also embark on a process to build in house capacity within its infrastructure management unit for us to expedite the process of building and maintaining our infrastructure projects.

We must encourage ourselves and our children to read, because through reading we become literate and South Africa needs literate people since we are a developing country. A culture of reading will contribute towards a life-long desire to learn and develop oneself intellectually, emotionally, and culturally. We therefore need vibrant community libraries, stocked with new, relevant books across all subjects, to assist people improve their skills and to prepare themselves better for their professions.

As the people of Limpopo Province we are equally thrilled and congratulate Mr. Makgahlela for winning the South African Librarian of the year and Dr. John Tsebe who was awarded with the Sali Trust Lifetime Achievement Award. This is an indication that people of this Province are serious about reading and our province is ranked amongst the best in the country. I urge all librarians to establish activities like book clubs and debate clubs which will instill the culture of reading in this community and encourage the community to take ownership of different activities in this library.

In conclusion I would like to borrow words from former American President, Barak Obama who once said "Reading is important. If you know how to read, then the whole world opens up to you".