

ADDRESS DELIVERED BY THE EXECUTIVE
MAYOR, IMT MAHLANGU AT THE HERITAGE
MONTH CELEBRATION, BOTSHABELO.

25 SEPTEMBER 2008.

Thank you
PROGRAMME DIRECTOR

Mr Speaker
The Chief Whip
Members of the Mayoral Committee present
Councillors
Heads of Departments of Steve Tshwete Municipality
Representatives from government departments
Representatives from other parastatals
Distinguished guests
Learners
Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning!

It is indeed an honour and privilege for me to be here with you today, to celebrate what is probably one of the most important events in our country, the rich history and heritage of our country which many of us don't fully understand and appreciate.

Allow me, in this occasion to pay tribute and wish former President, Nelson Mandela a happy birthday as we continue to celebrate through out the year. He was the first recipient of Ubuntu Award presented to him by the Department of Arts and

Culture through the National Heritage Council here at Botshabelo in 2006. I also believe that the continuous documentation about uTata, will sooner be part of the school curriculum, which in turn will be an accurate and an unforgettable history of our country.

Let me also take this opportunity to congratulate, Natalie du Toit for accomplishing 16th place by scooping 6 gold medals in the Women's Marathon 10km swimming competition at the Beijing Olympics .

I am saying this, because we have young able bodied people here, and this young girl, Natalie, is disabled, but she has proved beyond doubt that her passion and love for what she does, is deeper than the depth of all oceans.

Natalie is not a young South African, but also someone that young South Africans should look up to. Natalie made the country proud and has shown that through sheer determination, nothing is unachievable.

I also congratulate our silver medalist - Khotso Mokoena for his achievement in the long jump event.

Imagine you wake up one morning to discover that you have lost your memory... people who know nothing about the past are like people who have amnesia (loss of memory).

Our national symbols, are a symbol of our origin and heritage. The symbolism of the choice of venue, Botshabelo? A place of refuge, is not lost in our minds as interaction with African interactiong with Africans took place at various points in our history, it was here that many communities took refuge in this mission station,

and it was also here that people were forcefully removed from their homes and are now being returned.

What is heritage?

Heritage is what defines us as Africans, as distinct from other people, what we normally refer to as the inheritance or legacy. It is the foundation upon which most African societies are defined and founded. It defines what is best about us.

Yesterday, the nation joined hands and celebrated Heritage Day in grand styles in the nine provinces, but with one theme in mind of "celebrate our dance, celebrate our heritage."

And again, in Bethal, yesterday, the stature of one of the freedom fighter, Gert Sibande, was officially unveiled as a way of celebrating our heritage of an icons who fought tooth and nail for the birth of this democratic society.

We remember Gert Sibande, by exposing the harsh working conditions on Bethal potato farm, and the resultant potato boycott.

Born in Ermelo district in the eastern Transvaal in 1901, where he lived and worked with his father, a labour tenant. He never attended school, but taught himself to read and write, mainly in Zulu.

He became a spokesperson for the African National Congress. Sibande had a powerful personality which gained him of many and earned him the nickname of "Lion of the East". He was also instrumental in exposing the atrocities of the apartheid prison system in the mid 50's.

We mention these things, not to invigorate anger and violence especially to our young people, but we hope that you learn from these experiences and become young dynamic researchers in shaping the history and heritage of our country.

To add impetus to the Heritage Month Celebration, and the theme it bears, as a municipality we realized that most of us do not fully and clearly understand the origin and meaning of our national symbols which defines us before other nations.

We therefore resolved, as a municipality, that it is our duty to educate and promote these symbols to everyone in the jurisdiction of our municipality as they say a lot about our history and heritage which most of do not fully understand and appreciate.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must never ever allow ourselves, our children and the community at large to be subjected to ignorance which will result in slavery and servitude by other nations.

Hence I am saying it is extremely significant to know and understand who we are and where we come from.

Let me ask a question:

How many of us know the meaning of the Steve Tshwete Municipality, the Nkangala District, the Mpumalanga Province coat of arms, our National Flag and National anthem.

As delegates in this occasion, I urge you to carefully listen and learn from our presenters who will be unpacking the latter

symbols and please pass the knowledge to others so that we can be a knowledgeable nation.

Coming to the theme "celebrate the dance, celebrate our heritage. I must say that our national symbols and these symbols are perfectly intertwined.

Dance celebrates the grace of the human body, it celebrates the human body's energy and its inexhaustible capacities for total body articulation through every kind of inherited or learned movement. Dance is one of the greatest gifts Africa and her people have offered the world.

Dance had its modest beginnings at social gatherings. In every part of our country dance is a component of rituals and rites. We danced when our South African Flag was launched, we danced when our Steve Tshwete Coat of Arms was launched, we sang and danced when our Provincial legislature new logo, " Mpumalanga, A Pioneering Spirit was launched recently and we sang and danced when Nkangala District Municipality was officially launched.

There are different forms of dance that come from unique ethnic and regional backgrounds, expressing specific identities that define the uniqueness of those who perform it and the place the dance comes from. But the common experience of living together in the melting pot of cities like Johannesburg has broadened the meanings we give to our identities and given birth to something altogether new. Thus, what has come to be known as South African dance today, is not only influenced by different cultural inputs, it is often the sum total of all these.

Though others have viewed African dance as exotic entertainment and even as prurient entertainment, it is at the

heart of our African identity and cultural expression. Through dance Africans have mobilized for our struggles, in dance we have transmitted our history, through dance we have celebrated our joy and hopes. It remains central to our religious rituals, and the practice of our traditions and customs. Over the centuries, many traditional styles had developed and have been kept alive through special occasions. Africans perform dances of welcome, dances of rites of passage and of coming of age, warrior's dances to steel fighters for war, dances of love, dances of possession and dances of spiritual revelation.

Dance was and remains central to the African experience.

As we learn today, the origin and meaning of our national symbols, I invite you all, to mark this day in dance, to celebrate our dance, to celebrate our heritage.

Let us all return to our schools, families, workplace and organizations and keep the flame of recognizing our national symbols burning until the spirit of knowledge transforms our society into a better place for all.

Thank you