Address by Speaker Baleka Mbete MP, on the occasion of the 14th International Festival of Language and Culture, Braamfontein, 21 April 2016.

Programme Director

All the Organisers and Co-Sponsors of the Festival

Students

Distinguished Guests'

Ladies and gentlemen

Good Evening to you All.

I am delighted to join you at this, the 14th International Festival on Language and Culture. Thank you for this invitation.

This festival is truly unique in that it is able to bring together youth- possible future leaders, from so many diverse countries, and backgrounds to engage, and find each other. So, this is truly a multi-lateral moment. It is also a multi- cultural moment.

For me culture, which includes language diversity is not just about the economic value of our creative industries - It is what defines us as a civilisation. Culture helps us understand the world around us, explain it, sometimes escape from it, and – as even act as a catalyst for liberation, as was the case in South Africa. As Picasso puts it so eloquently: "washing the dust of daily life from our souls".

Programme Director

I agree fully with the assertion as stated in the objectives of the Festival-*"that the best way to combat violence and injustice is through education and sharing of cultural values".* Indeed it is through such learning and dialogue that the bonds of friendship are formed and lasting peace can be attained.

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Programme Director

This year, South Africa celebrates its 20th anniversary of the adoption of our Constitution which underscores that we are-

One people, one nation, bound together by a common heritage and shared destiny, which is a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic South Africa.

Our Constitution also guarantees all our people the right to practice their culture, language, beliefs and customs. Everyone is also guaranteed, the freedom of creativity without interference, as well as the freedom of expression.

In mainstreaming culture in our policies, we have –

- Placed the importance of culture firmly within the national educational curricula, as well as in non-formal educational initiatives.

- We have also established a language policy that encourages the growth of all people's languages, 11 to be exact and the 12th being braille within a multi – linguistic framework. This also includes the preservation and development of all indigenous languages.

Importantly, compliance of these policies are monitored by Institutions Supporting Democracy such as the Pan South African Language Board (PANSALB) and Human Rights Commission amongst others.

Programme Director

The world today, is undergoing all kinds of challenges.

Today, we are witnessing growing tensions among cultures and faiths. Often, we see a politics of polarization, and the targeting of migrants for stereotyping and violence.

And at times globalisation can be seen as a threat to local cultures and cultural diversity.

Therefore building peace and improving cross cultural understanding is not only about negotiations and contacts at the top, among leaders. It is also about what happens on the ground, at the grassroots.

This initiative to address youth unemployment and connecting young people to decent jobs is invaluable.

So too, is the focus on education. All countries are facing what is commonly called a "Youth Bulge." Creative solutions to this ticking time bomb calls for creative solutions. In this regard I wish to suggests that-

Investing in local cultural resources including tangible and intangible heritage including education, knowledge and skills, as well as music, dance, theatre and festivals, can develop sustainable creative economies, open up opportunities to youth, and help strengthen identity and social cohesion.

Promoting creativity for and among youth and harnessing young people's creative potential and energy therefore needs to be a priority in finding creative solutions to today's challenges.

Currently young people across the world are increasingly involved in heritage protection and promotion, recognising that heritage does not only belong to the past, but is also part of their identity.

Transmitting heritage values to young people favours intercultural understanding, respect for cultural diversity and helps create an environment conducive to a culture of peace.

Heritage related-initiatives which has been pioneered by Russia and Cuba for example- clearly demonstrate that culture is an indispensable driver and enabler of sustainable development.

Heritage provides testimonies to, and links between, the past and present. As one of the world's few inexhaustible natural resources, creativity is a source of considerable potential in promoting sustainable socio-economic development for people of all ages.

Thus, the creative industries can serve as a springboard for new ideas and innovation, which can open up new opportunities for employment and learning, while at the same time promoting well-being and self-esteem and empowering entire communities.

Young women and men are increasingly engaged in proposing creative solutions to local challenges. This creative energy needs to be harnessed so as to maximize the positive impact it can have on society.

In closing, Ladies and Gentlemen

Let us remember that whatever our backgrounds and traditions, we are all linked by something greater. We may be many cultures and speak many different languages- but we are a single human family.

That's the lesson that I have learnt and carried with me every day of my life. This is also the lesson, which I hope you will take with you.

Our interconnected world, and initiatives such as this Festival, is an opportunity to advance peace, development and human rights. These bridges must be built by young men and women like you, gathered here today.

Please do enjoy your stay in our country and I look forward to learning more of the outcome of this dialogue.

I thank you.

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