



Address by Mr Sibusiso Nkosi, Head of Communication and Marketing, Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) on the Occasion of International Tourist Guides' Day Celebration

**Date:** 20 February 2015

**Venue:** Maropeng, Cradle of Humankind, Gauteng

**Topic:** Use of Indigenous Languages in Guiding and Bridging Cultures



Programme Director:  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen  
Sons and daughters of Africa  
I greet you all

### **About PanSALB**

PanSALB was established in 1995 in terms of the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) Act 1995 as amended in 1999. Our mandate is to protect people's linguistic rights and promote national development amid the wide range of languages and cultures in our Rainbow Nation.

In terms of the PanSALB Act, our mandate is derived from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act, Sections 6(5) (a) and (b), the Public Finance Management Act 29 of 1999 and the Companies Act 61 of 1973, Section 21.

PanSALB is an independent organ of state, subject only to the Constitution and the legislation in terms of which the Board was founded in 1995. All other organs of state are enjoined to cooperate with PanSALB and not to interfere with the execution of our mandate.

The first Board was constituted in 1997.

### **How do we execute our mandate?**

PanSALB believes that the most effective way to protect and promote people's linguistic rights is by championing multilingualism in South Africa.

- We make recommendations with regard to any legislation, practice or policy dealing with language matters at any level of government.
- We make recommendations to organs of state at all levels of government for the adoption of measures aimed at promoting multilingualism.

- We actively promote an awareness of multilingualism as a national resource.
- We actively promote the development of the previously marginalised languages.
- We initiate studies and research to promote and create conditions for the development and use of all the official languages of South Africa, the Khoi, Nama and San languages and South African Sign Language.
- We promote and ensure respect for all other languages commonly used by communities in South Africa.
- We advise on the coordination of language planning in South Africa and facilitate cooperation with language planning agencies outside South Africa.
- We establish provincial language committees and national language bodies to advise on any language matter affecting a province or a specific language.
- We establish national lexicography units to operate as Section 21 companies and we allocate funds to them to fulfil their functions.
- We deal with complaints about language rights violations.

We strive to perform our duties without fear, favour or prejudice.

### **International Mother Language Day (IMLD)**

At the outset, let us applaud the the department of Tourism as architects of this impressive image, a conference, which also cater for the promotion and creation of conditions for the development and use of indigenous languages as provided for in the **PanSALB ACT 59 of 1995** on which PanSALB was established. We congratulate you primarily because of this pragmatically crafted topic which is also in keeping with the celebration of International Mother Language Day (IMLD).

IMLD was first proclaimed by the General Conference of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) in November 1999.

This date represents the specific day in 1952 when students demonstrated for Bangla to be recognised as one of the two national languages of the then Pakistan. Protesting students were shot and killed by police in Dhaka, and sacrificed their lives for their desire for the recognition of their mother tongue language.

On 16 May 2009 the United Nations General Assembly called upon Member States "to promote the preservation and protection of all languages used by peoples of the world". By the same resolution, the General Assembly proclaimed 2008 as the International Year of Languages, to promote unity in diversity and international understanding, multilingualism and multiculturalism.

IMLD has been observed every year since February 2000 to promote linguistic and cultural diversity and multilingualism.

### **Is it possible to use Indigenous Languages in Guiding and Bridging Cultures?**

It is our view that in order to effect social transformation and nurture South Africa's rich linguistic diversity to comply with our progressive constitutional language clause, we have to ensure that "perceptually valuable linguistic capital" (cf. Kamwangamalu 2000: 59) becomes accessible to speakers of the indigenous languages. In other words, in addition to being vehicles of cultural heritage, these languages must also become vehicles of opportunities for advancement. They must be perceived as "**fashionable**", and associated with high status functions like "work of government", "the language of Parliament", "book publishing in indigenous languages", to name a few possibilities. In this way South Africa will truly live Nelson Mandela's dream of ensuring that his rainbow nation does not become an illusion.

The use indigenous languages by South African tour guides provides us with a chance to make them ***fashionable***, as they (tour guides) represent a vital link between visitors and their experience of the multicultural South Africa as well as to its many tourist attractions and heritage.

It is for this reason that we as PanSALB, wish to salute the Department of Tourism for seeking to recognize and ascertain the significance of our indigenous languages in the tour guiding trade. This recognition and initiative to also call for a paper on the use of indigenous languages in tour guide by the Department, provides for a taste of South Africa's rich linguistic or literary heritage and diversity.

It is an initiative which is also in keeping with the Constitution of the Republic which provides for 11 official languages. Not only are the 11 official languages named and their uses and right to promotion specified, but specific attention is also paid to the Khoi, Nama and San languages and to South African Sign Language. In addition, there is also a mention of "all languages" commonly used by communities in South Africa.

South Africa is well known for its rich, literary heritage, linguistic heritage, culture and traditions, and it is precisely beyond any reasonable doubt that, it is this medley that saw the coining of the popular term "**the rainbow nation**". A term that is also reflective of this cultural, linguistic and literary wealth and heritage of South Africa. We are of the view that this has to be always reflected in South African tour guide work, for this is what will distinguish South Africa from the other tourist destinations of the world.

South Africa's indigenous languages which also include some of the official and non-official languages and literature are also celebrated as part of a rich heritage, and therefore need to be unveiled to the entire world. In a country like ours which also boasts of eleven official languages as well as two Nobel literary laureates - JM Coetzee and Nadine Gordimer, we cannot afford to put our indigenous languages and literature in the sidelines for this is part of what makes South Africa truly South African. Our indigenous languages and literature have been also key to the liberation of South Africa and this should be displayed within the tourism industry.

It is important that tour guides in this democratic era, find a modern approach in expressing themselves through indigenous languages. We say this fully aware that currently, tour guides do strive to carry-out their tasks in the language of the visitors' choice and interprets the cultural and natural

heritage of an area, which is a good and commendable practice. We however feel that the use on indigenous languages will also bring more excitement and oomph in the tourism industry. How then can this be achievable? While there can be so many ways, let us propose the following for this tourism conference;

**Written notices, naming and signposts** (Tourists sites should reflect these languages)

The tourist's experience and admiration will always enhanced when a spoken word is also reinforced by a written word. The use of indigenous languages in naming, signposts and notices in places of tourist attractions, accompanied with relevant translations into an identifiable lingua-franca, will undoubtedly go a long way in showcasing our linguistic heritage. In so doing, we shall be able to increase more interaction and engagement with our visitors. For example a site such as **Maropeng**, has a historic attachment to its name meaning which may be provided to tourists if necessary, than trying to find an English equivalent name. It will also be interesting to highlight that the word Maropeng which is in Sotho languages (**Setswana, Sepedi and Sesotho**) also appears in Tshivenda as **Marubini** for the same meaning which will be interesting to unpack.

**Use of simultaneous interpreting gadgets** (can aid in the use of indigenous languages)

The use of an Axitour tour guide system AT-808 can also bring lasting solutions towards bringing an effective utilization of our African indigenous languages. This is an easy-to-use wireless communication system intended specifically for tour groups. The system can be used for simultaneous language translation applications. Up to 8 channels can be used simultaneously for multilingual or simultaneous language translation applications. Simultaneous interpreting is a good and effective way to go with the South African Parliament already renowned for this mode of interpreting in almost eleven channels catering for all eleven official languages. The use of a language closely linked and historically associated with the tourism site will be a good starting point, of-course with provisions of possibly bringing

other languages on board and providing translations into a relevant target language.

### **Use of pre-recorded commentaries**

Use of pre-recorded commentaries, on information relevant to specific guiding, will also be instrumental in showcasing our languages. Pre-recorded commentaries in indigenous languages with possible interpreting, will also be highly instrumental in giving a flair of our languages to the visiting communities.

### **Active Involvement**

The involvement of visitors in echoing or impersonating some of the keywords in indigenous languages will also contribute to a fruitful use of our indigenous languages. This will also contribute to bringing enthusiasm and lasting remembrance from the tourists rather than when they are involved as passive listeners.

### **Literary Museums**

I am not sure whether this forms part of our tourist destinations. We have in SA the Afrikaans literary museum in Bloemfontein and the English literary museum in Grahams town. The Sesotho literary museum in Bloemfontein is still in its infancy stage while I do not know of any in another indigenous language. I am of the view that despite showcasing our literary heritage, literary museums have the capacity to market our indigenous languages and literature. It is for this reason that we should research and explore on mechanisms to have such intertwined with our tourism sites.

### **Target v/s Source Languages**

While simultaneous interpreting is an effective tool of transmitting messages from a source to target language, we need to strive that, indigenous languages should be source languages instead of target languages during translations and interpreting. In that way local visits by foreign internationals,

will be given a South African flavor which will leave an indelible mark to tourists.

### **Tour Guiding Training programmes in indigenous languages**

Provision of Tour Guide Training programmes in Indigenous Languages will yield enormous dividends in the Tourism sector. Practitioners must be trained in providing services in indigenous languages historically associated with the tourism site.

### **Conclusion**

World renowned tour guide expert, K L Pond (1993), in his book "The Professional Guide – Dynamics of Tour Guiding, published in New York: has this to say, I quote; "Traditionally, language has been the main tool of tour guides as their role was seen as being more related to the social and administrative needs of the group and information rather than interpretation driven **(Pond, 1993)**.

Desktop Research also reveals that 60% of communication is non-verbal, that is, how we say things, with only 7% relating directly to the content of the message **(Thus according to reseacher Pastorelli, way-back in 2003)**. From a retention perspective only 20% of what is heard is retained (James and Robertson, 2003). For a tour guide whose main tool is language it is crucial these figures are understood, especially when a translator is trying to interpret and then communicate the message.

With this small contribution, we wish the department of tourism, in all the post-conference endeavors to ensure the implementation of some feasible and workable recommendations brought to this conference from day one. I am saying so in remembering what someone once said about South Africa, that it is notorious for being over-conferenced, being over seminard, over-work-shopped, over-chartered, over-researched and over-round-tabled, but with no tangible measures of implementation. From where I stand, one can only hope and pray that this conference will be a building block towards



attaining a tour-friendly South Africa through an overhauled tour guiding sector.

*Let us make Africa the Tree of Life*

I thank you!

