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**MINISTRY OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES**

**REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**Address by the Deputy Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Honorable Thabang Makwetla.**

**9th Annual Funda Mzantsi Championship, Eden Church,**

**George, Southern Cape**

1. **October 2018.**

Our host and Minister of Arts and Culture - Mr Nathi Mthethwa; Executive Mayor of George Municipality - Councillor Melvin Naik; National Librarian and CEO of the National Library of SA Professor Rocky Ralebipi-Simela; Senior Managers and staff from the National Library of South Africa and Centre for the Book; Senior Members and Officials of the Department of Correctional Services; Senior Members and representatives of the Department of Arts and Culture; Participants of the 9th Annual Funda Mzantsi Championship; Educators; Adjudicators; Members of the Media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is an honour that I join you here today, at the 9th Annual Funda Mzantsi National Championship. This event takes place in October; the month where our country was blessed with one of its finest daughters, Mama Nontsikelelo Albertina Sisulu. It was on the 21st of October, 100 years ago that Albertina Sisulu, a gallant fighter and mother of our struggle whose sacrifices freed our country, was born.

uMama Sisulu was very passionate about Education, literacy and access to knowledge. She is a struggle veteran who played a significant role in the fight against Apartheid and Bantu Education; which is a system that deprived black people from proper education and restricted what we could learn and be exposed to. Despite being an orphaned teenager having to miss school to take care of her siblings; uMama Sisulu excelled academically and was awarded a four year high school scholarship at Mariazel College in Matatiele, in the Eastern Cape. She continued to be trained as a professional Nurse; and was keenly interested and invested in education for the rest of her life, which she saw as central to the struggle.

As we continue with our efforts to transform our country, and our correctional system in particular, we do so as part of our determination to build a society that uMama Sisulu envisioned.

The DCS is mandated by the White Paper on Corrections to provide for the safe custody of offenders. We must ensure that offenders are exposed to rehabilitative opportunities that increase their chances of successful reintegration; in order to become citizens who are self-sufficient, lead a crime-free life and contribute productively to the growth of our economy. The increasing rate of crime in South Africa is fuelled by a plethora of social issues; such as poverty, lack of access to quality formal education, unemployment and inadequate positive socialization opportunities. The roots of the crime problem must be addressed by supporting social programs that improve quality of life and prevent the development of criminal behaviours.

It is for this reason that we at the Department of Correctional Services are excited and enthusiastically committed to our partnership with the ‘Centre for Book’, a branch of the National Library of the Department of Arts and Culture. We have adopted Funda Mzantsi as it addresses challenges in education, literacy, reading and comprehension which especially affects the youth of our country. This programme is being utilized as a vehicle to stimulate greater offender participation in literacy programmes as part of our rehabilitation efforts. We see this as a strong intervention to foster a conducive environment that encourages all South Africans to pick up a book and read. Reading creates knowledge champions and fosters an environment for innovation and learning.

The Funda Mzantsi initiative; is an important tool that will empower our offenders for successful reintegration into their communities. To equip them with the best possible opportunity for a second chance in life, the ability to make better choices and be more discerning citizens. We need such programs that focus on building contributing members of the economy; irrespective of their passed circumstances, in our effort to invest in our youth who are the future leaders of this country and the world. Funda Mzantsi aims to equip participants with the ability to develop an appreciation of learning and knowledge through reading, reviewing, providing analysis of books and engaging in constructive debates on topical issues.

A library is much more than a building that houses books and data. It’s a place that provides a safe haven for the imaginative spirit and it has always been a window to a larger world. Through books we learn about and explore other cultures and worlds we know nothing about, a place where we discover big ideas, formulate opinions and construct profound concepts that help move our story forward.

It is imperative that we continuously reflect on our history and where we come from as a country, as we enjoy the excitement of the Funda Mzantsi National Championship over the next few days. South Africa is experiencing a literacy crisis which is a problem with far reaching consequences that impact negatively on our ability to grow and develop.

The 2016 Progress in International Reading Literacy (PIRL) study found that 78% of Learners in their fourth year of primary schooling could not read; approximately 4.7 million South Africans are completely illiterate and 80% of South African Schools have no library.

The lack of a reading culture amongst South Africans is also, to some degree, a result of the legacy of Apartheid and the structure of the Bantu Education system that our struggle heroes, like uMama Sisulu, fought so hard to abolish. A lot of our elders struggle with reading comprehension; which also contributes to the lack of awareness and culture of visiting libraries, reading to our families and so on. Investing in improving literacy levels in South Africa is therefore a primary step in realising a true democracy and breaking the cycle of crime, poverty and unequal access to opportunities.

The ability to read is the building block and foundation that ensures that one can get the most out of learning. Literacy directly tackles the issue of unemployment by upskilling people to a level where they can secure a job, start a business and make a meaningful contribution to society. A literate, educated and skilled workforce is also central to a thriving South African economy. In the words of Nelson Mandela- “In a world where knowledge truly is power, education and literacy are the building blocks that unlock the gates of opportunity and success.”

The Department of Correctional Services began participating in the Funda Mzantsi Project in 2010 at Pollsmoor Management Area in the Western Cape. Since then, the programme been successfully rolled-out in all 6 DCS Regions; with almost all our correctional facilities having book clubs. Last year (2017) 180 offenders from correctional centres across the country participated in the National Funda Mzantsi Championship. This year our participation has grown to 240 male and female offenders from 24 book clubs across different regions in the country.

The DCS is realising tangible benefits through our participation. The process of taking part in the championship has assisted with the improvement of the Grade 12 pass rate of inmates. The program improves learners’ ability to read with understanding, and analyse, as compared to reading for pleasure. Over the last four years, our matric pass rate has increased from 68.9% in 2014 to 76.7 % in 2017.

Major tasks undertaken by DCS in line with our rehabilitation mandate include; literacy, vocational training, basic occupational skills training, entrepreneurial skills training, business studies, engineering studies, basic and tertiary education qualifications. We have made progress and recorded significant achievements in line with this goal; which shows that the Department is making inroads in our mission to transform prisons into correctional facilities.

At least 127 inmates from correctional centres across Gauteng graduated with various higher education qualifications on the 21st of September 2018. They received Certificates, Diplomas, as well as Bachelors and Honours degrees. One offender also attained his Masters’ Degree in Tax Law. In July of this year, 18 offenders from the Oudtshoorn Correctional Facility, graduated with their N4 Certificate in Tourism from the South Cape College.

The Department currently manages 14 formal education full-time correctional centre schools, for the provision of Adult Education and Training (AET) and Grade 10-12 programmes. The Department also runs 21 farms and 115 agriculture small sites where an average of 3 000 offenders work every day. We have 10 steel and 19 textile workshops, one shoe factory, and eight bakeries in which 1 500 offenders work.

Last year (2017), DCS entered into a Memorandum of Agreement with UNISA to provide academic support to student offenders who are studying higher education through correspondence. UNISA has also assisted the Department in the establishment of computer hubs as central learning centres, where offenders have direct access to UNISA. To date, 14 UNISA hubs are functional throughout the country.

Offenders’ enrolment and participation in DCS skills development programmes increased by approximately 79% from the 2013/14 to the 2017/2018 financial year. The Department also runs 21 farms and 115 agriculture small sites where an average of 3 000 offenders work every day. We have 10 steel and 19 textile workshops, one shoe factory, and eight bakeries in which 1 500 offenders work. There is also a school which was built by inmates which was also officially opened at the Boksburg Correctional Centre as part of skills development and self-sufficiency.

It is important to note that the skills and training acquired by inmates are not only for their personal benefit; but must be utilized in supporting developmental infrastructure projects, and general maintenance work in the Department’s facilities, schools and other public facilities

Offenders utilising their skills to build and maintain facilities; is also a step that contributes to our vision for DCS to be a self-sustainable department where offenders produce what they consume. This begins teaching them to learn responsibility and accountability for their actions as offenders who have wronged members of our society.

We are pleased with our long-standing partnership with the Department of Arts and Culture and their ‘Centre for the Book’; and are committed to expand these book clubs to involve even more Offenders and Parolees. We look forward to contributing to the growth of this great initiative so to involve more participants such as students from institutions of higher learning. As well as strengthen partnerships with TVET Colleges, Universities, SETAs, Businesses, Civil Society, Government and other organisations.

The Department will also be looking more closely at our monitoring and tracking of the impact of our participation in the intervention; to ensure that we improve over time and the program has continuity and sustainability. Part of the Department’s objectives in our participation of Funda Mzantsi; is to ensure that new authors, poets and publishers are produced and nurtured through the programme as a tool for individual offender reintegration into community.

Our Policy states that Offenders can only publish after they have been released from our correctional centres. However we need to improve on the type of support we provide for Parolees to be capacitated with the ability to publish their work. This is an area that the Department needs to work on in order to make sure that the project realises fully its intended objectives. We also face a challenge with accreditation and recognition of the work that offenders conduct while in our facilities.

This is a challenge we constantly grapple with as we are aware that the lack of accreditation presents a challenge especially when the offender seeks employment after release.

In relation to this specific project; the Directorate of Skills Development has been requested to look into the possibility of accreditation for Librarians with the relevant Sector Education and Training Authority.

Let me take this opportunity to thank our officials, colleagues from the Department of Arts and Culture, the National Library of South Africa and all the event organisers for all the hard work in making this event a success. We appreciate the commitment of our officials and your resilience in working every day, through all the challenges, to ensure that the DCS truly becomes a department of corrections.

As a department, we also want to take this opportunity and appeal to our communities to work closely with us, and support the Department in the fight against crime. More importantly we plead with our communities not to stigmatise and marginalise rehabilitated offenders, but rather to embrace them upon their release. This will ensure that our social reintegration programmes are strengthened, and that we break the cycle of recidivism or repeat crime.

I wish all the participants of the Funda Mzantsi National Championship the best of luck. I trust that the next few days will be a fun and successful educational event and memorable experience for all.

**THANK YOU.**