



MINISTRY OF JUSTICE AND CORRECTIONAL SERVICES: REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Speech by the Deputy Minister of Justice and Correctional Services

Mr. T. Makwetla, MP

National Offender Choir Festival

Nangoza Jebe Hall, New Brighton, Port Elizabeth, Eastern Cape,

17 April 2015

Programme Director,

Our Host, The Mayor of Nelson Mandela Metro, Hon Benson Fihla,

Chief Deputy Commissioners of the DCS,

Regional Commissioners and the entire leadership of DCS here present,

Our Partners and Stakeholders in the endeavour to rehabilitate South Africa's offenders,

Various Community leaders in our midst,

Dear Offenders, participants at this choir festival from all Regions of the DCS,

The Provincial Department of Sports, Recreation, Arts and Culture representatives,

It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Minister Michael Masutha, to opening this positive and inspirational cultural event in the Department of Correctional Services, The National Offender Choir Festival.

This April, South Africa celebrates Freedom Month under the theme: *"Celebrating the Beginning of the Third Decade of our Freedom through Accelerating Radical Economic Transformation"*.

April will forever resonate in the history of our nation as the month that witnessed the first democratic elections in 1994; that gave birth to freedom, and constitutional democracy, in South Africa. This election marked a turning point which saw the previously disadvantaged communities become part of the mainstream South African political life. Our country now belongs to all who live in it.

The 1994 breakthrough advanced the values of freedom and democracy, which are an integral part of our constitutional democracy. Our Freedom Day is celebrated on 27<sup>th</sup> April. It is a celebration of the historic participation of all the people of South Africa in the first free, and fair, democratic elections.

Over the last two decades, we have worked hard to construct a governance system that serves its entire people. In fact, South Africa has come a long way in addressing the economic, social and cultural challenges created under apartheid.

The year 2015 ushers the beginning of the third decade of democracy and freedom. In 10 days from now South Africa will again be called to reflect on the progress we have made as a country in moving South Africa forward.

This year's Freedom Day occurs against the backgrounds of the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the historic adoption of the Freedom Charter in Kliptown, Soweto. The values espoused in the Freedom Charter, still hold true and they are an overall vision for a non-racial democratic, society we seek.

The attainment of freedom, and democracy, in this country was realised through the culmination of years of struggle, where many suffered senseless brutalities and humiliating laws making the lives of the Black minorities unbearable.

60 Years ago South Africa's non-racial democratic majority, articulated their desire for an alternative Penal System and an end to the misery of Black Communities in the Freedom Charter.

This vision influenced the endeavors to transform SA's institutions of derision to places of new beginnings. Today, our correctional centres are focused on humane incarceration as well as access to education, and health care services, with opportunities for rehabilitation that aim to transform individuals from a lifestyle of criminality, and malevolence, to upright citizens, hence this nation building cultural event we are here to revel in.

Our vision for the Department is to provide the best Correctional Services for a safer South Africa, where all can live peacefully. We are encouraged by the progress made in advancing the rehabilitation goals of the department. Through joint efforts, we are confident that our rehabilitation programmes will transform offenders into law-abiding citizens who will become less prone to breaking the law thereby prevent recidivism upon release.

Although progress has been made in transforming the prison system in South Africa, more still needs to be done to ensure that we continue to promote, and protect, human rights within our facilities. Over the past years, we have recorded a significant decrease in escapes from our correctional centres and remand detention facilities. Many sentenced offenders have access to education and skills development opportunities, while both sentenced, and remand, detainees have access to standard health care services.

Indeed, there are still various challenges, including the reduction of overcrowding, that we still have to overcome. But all these, is work in progress and we remain confident that we will succeed.

We have gathered here today, at the National Offender Choir Festival, to advance the course of music as a potent tool towards rehabilitation.

Many will agree that music has a way of soothing the soul, and more. If there is something that can reduce pain, enhance your mood, calm you down, boost your immune system and enhance your ability to learn while you enjoy it, its music. Music is, indeed, a powerful universal language appealing to all of us.

To all participants at this National Offender Choir Festival, you should count yourselves fortunate to be afforded this opportunity to rehabilitate through a medium that does not only contribute to peace, and laughter in our lives, but can also bring healing to our souls.

As Billy Joel puts it: "Music in itself is healing. It's an explosive expression of humanity. It's something we are all touched by. No matter what culture we're from, everyone loves music".

As they say "Where words leave off, music begins".

In conclusion, I wish all participants to appreciate that, by virtue of you being here today, you are all victors. Look at this opportunity as another way of contributing to your fellow inmates' journey towards rehabilitation, while you are being rehabilitated yourself. Let this not only be about winning, but let it be about celebrating your God-given talent that can touch lives and, eventually, change somebody to be a better person.

The Middle Ages Philosopher, Pluto says, "Music is a moral law. It gives soul to the universe, wings to the mind, flight to the imagination, and charm and gaiety to life and to everything". I must concede that his submission is compelling indeed.

Let us, therefore, sit back, relax and enjoy the beautiful sweet melodies from behind the bars – our correctional centres.

I THANK YOU.