



**MINISTRY
CORRECTIONAL SERVICES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

MEDIA STATEMENT

02 October 2026

Deputy Minister Ntshalintshali calls for Reading, Rehabilitation and Inclusive Communities at 16th Funda Mzantsi Championship

Deputy Minister of Correctional Services, Honourable Lindiwe Ntshalintshali, has called on South Africans to harness the power of reading, education and rehabilitation to address social challenges and contribute to building safer, more inclusive and knowledgeable communities.

The Deputy Minister was speaking at the closing ceremony of the 16th Funda Mzantsi Championship, held on 02 October 2026 in George, Western Cape. Held over a week, the Championship brought together 540 participants, including offenders in the care of the Department of Correctional Services (DCS), university students, school learners and members of community book clubs. The event provided a platform for participants to demonstrate their commitment to reading, learning, literacy and personal development.

In her address, Deputy Minister Ntshalintshali emphasised that education, reading and access to information have an important role to play in confronting social challenges, including gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF). "The fight against GBVF requires the community to come and work together, and Funda Mzantsi cultivates that platform," said Deputy Minister Ntshalintshali.

She emphasised that rehabilitation must go beyond addressing behaviour and must also confront attitudes, beliefs and social norms that contribute to violence and the abuse of women and children.

"Through our rehabilitation programmes, we must equip our offenders to take responsibility for their actions and teach them about respect," she said. The Deputy Minister further called on communities to challenge harmful beliefs and protect schools and libraries as important institutions that provide access to knowledge and opportunities for learning. She said reading contributes to developing informed citizens who are better equipped to participate meaningfully in society. "A nation that reads, is a nation that thinks," she said.

Deputy Minister Ntshalintshali welcomed the inclusion of Nama in this year's Championship and the plans to introduce sign language, describing these developments as an important step towards strengthening

multilingualism and inclusion within Funda Mzantsi. “The inclusion of Nama reminds us of the linguistic richness of our country. Each language is a representation of our uniqueness as a country; they do not replace one another. As we build a culture of reading and literacy, we must make sure sign language is part of it,” she said.

National Commissioner of Correctional Services, Mr Makgothi Samuel Thobakgale, paid tribute to DCS officials and partners who work throughout the year to deliver Funda Mzantsi, emphasising that the Championship is not a once-off event but forms part of a broader commitment to literacy, rehabilitation and social reintegration. He also acknowledged the partnership between DCS and the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, through the National Library of South Africa's Centre for the Book, as well as George Municipality and the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB).

The National Commissioner said these partnerships give practical expression to government's commitment to collaboration across institutions and sectors in advancing literacy, education, rehabilitation and community development.

Chairperson of the National Library of South Africa (NLSA) Board, Mr Bernardo Maralack, said the Championship demonstrates the transformative power of reading and the important role played by libraries in changing lives. “Libraries are places where lives can be changed,” said Mr Maralack, while encouraging participants to challenge themselves, confront their fears and embrace opportunities to learn and grow.

Deputy Minister Ntshalintshali congratulated the winners and expressed appreciation to all participants, organisers, officials, partners and stakeholders whose commitment contributed to the success of the 16th Funda Mzantsi Championship. She emphasised that the value of Funda Mzantsi must extend beyond the Championship and have a lasting impact in communities. “The real measure of Funda Mzantsi is not in this room. It goes way beyond the championship into our communities,” she said

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Issued by the Ministry of Correctional Services