



Parliamentary Caucus

National Assembly

Heritage Day Debate

Theme: "Celebrating 30 years of unity in diversity and paying tribute to those who laid their lives for our democracy"

19 September 2024

Comrade M.Mmolotsane

Honourable House Chairperson, South Africa is a country characterised by diversity. We are a people from different geographical localities spanning 9 provinces, which range from the Gauteng province which houses the Cradle of Humankind where fossils of the earliest life forms are found, and the Western Cape province where you can find Robben Island which is a symbol for the struggle of freedom and where many of our political prisoners such as Nelson Mandela, Walter Sisulu, Harry Gwala and Robert Sobukwe, Andimba Toivo Toivo, and others were imprisoned.

We are also a linguistically diverse people with 12 official languages including the recognition of the South African Sign Language as the 12th Official Language. It is in this spirit that we support the signing of the BELA Bill into law by President Cyril Ramaphosa, and its provisions to support our linguistic diversity and promote multilingualism in our education system. The signing of the BELA Bill marks a positive step in ensuring that our differences are embraced and can no longer be used as barriers to access and success. 30 years into democracy, a minority within our society seeks to retain what the youth generation of 1976 fought and died for. Our diversity should not serve as a source of division as observed in some schools in various communities.

The government ought to allocate sufficient resources for the development of our official languages, for mother tongue teaching and learning in our education system and for sign language to improve accessibility.

The South African heritage is also underpinned by an intricate history, tied to the rest of the African continent, whose history has often been distorted and marginalised. These narratives are aimed at undermining the agency of Africans and their contributions to civilisation and innovation. A critical component of celebrating our heritage is reclaiming our narrative of history and challenging falsified and distorted Eurocentric narratives using institutions like schools to teach a reviewed history from an African perspective that reflects the complex and rich history of our struggles, economic and sociocultural systems, which existed even before the period of colonialism.

We must reclaim the narrative of our history, from an African perspective as part of restoring the identity and dignity of our people. This will also impact our national consciousness to have an appreciation of the vastness, diversity and complexity of our history, and the multiple contributions to foster a deeper appreciation of where we come from and support strides to realise a united non-racial, sexist, democratic and prosperous society.



Furthermore, this also requires addressing the erasure of women which is the marginalisation and underrepresentation of women's voices, experiences and contributions to various spheres of society including politics, science and many other spheres. One of the glaring areas of underrepresentation of women is in our public monuments such as statues of liberation fighters. Despite the vital role of women such as Charlotte Maxeke, Ray Alexander Simons, Victoria Mxenge, and Dorothy Nomzansi Nyembe among others in the anti-apartheid movement, monuments and statues commemorating women across the country are overwhelmingly rare, especially compared to the male leaders. The erasure of women is not only a reflection of patriarchal norms but also indicative of the continued work we must collectively do to close gender disparities and start recognizing the contributions of women and creating meaningful opportunities for participation and success.

Honourable Chair,

The media, music and other creative arts remain an important component in preserving and shaping the South African heritage, from the messages of resistance conveyed in the work of Miriam Makeba and Hugh Masekela to the contemporary vibrant sounds of Amapiano championed by Kabza the Small and Uncle Waffles, as well as stories told in film and visual arts such as Sarafrina and Shaka iLembe. All of these are an incredible expression of our evolving culture, reflecting various moments and contexts, and aligning to the people of the time. This is why we also welcome technological advancements and the use of social media in not only documenting and preserving our history but also inspiring new generations to engage and celebrate their heritage by using modern innovation. Innovative mediums such as PodCasts can spread our heritage through popular culture. Creative artists such as Mac G and Sol Phenduka have produced the largest podcast called The Podcast and Chill. We must support such initiatives as part of transforming the creative sector.

Equally important in an evolving society is the protection and preservation of our Indigenous Knowledge System and therefore, we recognize and applaud the work done by institutions such as the Indigenous Knowledge Systems Centre at the University of North West, whose programs are developed and designed to recognize, develop, protect, promote and affirm Indigenous Knowledge System as a body of knowledge relevant to the knowledge economy.

Honourable Chair,

We must be resolved to rid our society of destructive narratives and practices which hinder reconciliation efforts and social cohesion. We must be resolved to uphold the Constitutional principles of diversity, respect and tolerance.

As we continue to celebrate our rich heritage in this month, let the words of uTata Nelson Mandela echo when he said,

“We truly have many cultures, yet we are one nation. We are truly diverse, yet we are bound together in a common destiny in the southern part of Africa. We are all South Africans.”

We are compelled never to lose sight of the fact that our rich diversity is our greatest treasure and strength as a nation. Our identity and unity as South Africa are not built nor



should we aspire for them to mean conformity or sameness. Ours is an intricate identity rooted in diversity in religions, ethnicities, languages, cultures, traditions and customs. Ours is of unity in diversity.

Thank you.