

**DEBATE SPEECH BY LIMPOPO MEC FOR EDUCATION
ISHMAEL KGETJEPE ON INTERNATIONAL LITERACY DAY,
NCOP, CAPE TOWN, 04 SEPTEMBER 2018**

Chairperson

Honourable members

Ladies and gentleman

We are indeed delighted to be present amidst you this afternoon in celebrating and debating International Literacy Day, in a manner that will remind us of the significance of the ability to read and write. This debate is taking place in a week when the country is observing and celebrating the National Book Week, an important week that calls on all of us to reflect on how much we have done to inculcate the culture of reading in communities. Our people have to be literate for the good cause of the humanity. This debate should and must inspire our collective efforts towards the critical direction of total literacy in our communities through effective advocacy and cooperation and support of government programmes.

When we talk International Literacy Day and Literacy in a digital world, it is difficult not to mention the profound words of the 2001 Nobel Peace Prize winner and the seventh Secretary General of the United Nations, the late Kofi Annan, who once stated emphatically that:

“Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope. It is a basic tool for daily life in modern society. It is a wall against poverty and a building block of development. Literacy is a vehicle for the promotion of cultural and national identity. Especially for girls and women, it is an agent of family health and nutrition. For everyone, everywhere, literacy is, along with education in general, a basic human right. Literacy is, finally, the road to human progress and the means through which, every man, woman and child can realize his or her full potential”.

From these wise words of one of our celebrated sons of Africa, we clearly understand that literacy has far greater strength in contributing for the well-being and happiness of a society. It is essentially a must have instrument of empowerment that can improve one’s health, one’s income and one’s relationship with the world. It is one that can improve and ensure sustainable development, peace, and democracy in our communities.

We are not just celebrating the day but we are celebrating progress in our fight and quest to eradicate illiteracy in schools, families, workplaces and in our communities at large. Our current learners in schools and those who have completed their Adult and Education Training programmes in our province are a living testimony of the progress we are making.

It remains a cause for concern in South Africa in general and Limpopo in particular that many of our learners, especially in the primary schooling sector, do not perform at the expected grade levels when standardized tests are administered, the barrier being the ability to read. The Progress In Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) which was released in 2017 indicates that most of our Grade 4 learners in South Africa cannot read with comprehension. In the area of languages, most grade 4 learners tested in Sepedi, Tshivhenda, Xitsonga and IsiNdebele could not satisfactorily read.

This state of affairs says to us we must work harder and collaboratively to address the situation as Mahatma Gandhi of India called it: **“illiteracy is a sin and shame and must be eradicated.”**

As a Department we are introducing e-Library in the province which are launching this month. It is the first of its kind and we are going to distribute 405 tablets to 27 schools. These tablets come along with content assess points loaded with books. This is an investment from DBE and the Department will be providing training to these schools for effective usage of these gadgets.

The promotion of access to Early Childhood Development has increased to 92.9% in 2017/18 financial year with 2 325 out of 2 385 public primary schools offering Grade R. The Department is strengthening the usage of library

through the reading for pleasure in partnership with Room-to-Read. To date, the partnership is benefiting 75 primary schools in Sekhukhune. In this coming month, we have line up programmes around Read to Lead and Drop All and Read Campaigns to encourage learners and our communities to read for pleasure. We are further aiming to strengthen training of school principals and teachers on National Guidelines for School Library and Information Services which are meant to assist schools to establish and maintain libraries. We are working very closely with the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture and in this regard we have equipped 82 libraries with ICT Infrastructure. 69 920 library materials were also disseminated across all districts libraries.

Working with NGOs like Molteno Institute, we have handed over Grade 1 to 3 African literature books for reading purposes in primary schools. We are also collaborating on the training of educators on storytelling, something that will trigger the interest of learners in reading.

The significance of the ability to read and write is something that cannot be taken lightly because literacy has far greater strength in contributing for the well-being and happiness of society. With the fourth industrial revolution very much upon us, we have to raise literacy levels in disadvantaged communities by supporting

children to develop good language skills before starting schools, by providing the right support to primary schools, supporting parents and guardians to help with their children's reading and by celebrating the enjoyment of reading in our own communities. The fourth industrial revolution which is characterized by new technologies, new powers, new responsibilities should see us working with families, communities and our schools to change the pattern of intergenerational illiteracy and in the process highlight the importance of reading in building a fairer society.

Issues of literacy are very serious because these days, various sectors use high tech machines that require the abilities to read and write for successful operations. We are saying the fortunate lot must reach out to the unfortunate and equip them with this powerful weapon of literacy.

Our appeal to all stakeholders in the sector is to reinforce their commitment to the eradication of illiteracy, so that our people can be empowered enough to benefit from the Fourth Industrial Revolution, which is here to transform how we look at the world, our thinking and our approach to the world. The Fourth Industrial Revolution and digital literacy is a thread that connects the world into one global village. The implication for education is to be able to teach and nurture our children and communities for the future

with a targeted decrease of paper in the classroom. Our people must become active participants in the knowledge economy.

We have an opportunity to make use of our literacy to work for safer environment, career progression, liberation of society and happier communities. We have a responsibility to attend to the call of our society, as an opportunity to benefit those less fortunate than us. Our campaigns such as the Drop All and Read will not be as successful as expected if our community's literacy levels are not attended to. We must get our nation to read.

Much still needs to be done and that is a point we must emphasize that we have not yet achieved everything. Much more work must be done because for us literacy is at the heart of basic education for all and very much essential in benefiting those that are less fortunate than some of us. It is a fact that digital literacy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution are an intergral part of the other and endeavors are needed in this aspect. We need more activists, mobilisers, trainers and teachers of non-literates in our communities while the traditional work of teaching and learning continues in our schools.

Indeed Kofi Annan was on point when he said: “**Literacy is a bridge from misery to hope**” Let us build these bridges for our people.

Together, moving South Africa forward

I thank you.