

Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker

Honourable Premier, Mr DD Mabuza

Honourable Members of the Executive Council

Honourable Members of the Provincial Legislature

Distinguished Guests

Fellow Compatriots

Allow me to borrow the words of wisdom from Former President, Mr Nelson Mandela in one of his Heritage Day speeches: *"When our first democratically-elected government decided to make Heritage Day one of our national days, we did so because we knew that our rich and varied cultural heritage has a profound power to help build our new nation"*.

The new nation is what South Africa has now become to be known off by the world. What a marvellous country we have.

This is a country of envy and much recognition in the globe - thanks to its constitution and democratic principles.

The rich geographic landscapes, abundant minerals, impeccable tourist attractions and cultural diversity amongst others are a marvel.

The "rainbow nation" which was born after the country experienced cross-cultural interactions amongst all races in the country, gave a sense of a nation that looked poised at burying all the past disparities.

By expressing yourself culturally and embracing other cultures is a correct receipt for this beautiful country of ours.

Over the last few years, the country has seen a great progress in the proclamation of legislations that embraces human rights, encourages democratic debates, and freedom of expression, association and so on.

In short, the Bill of Rights encapsulates every democratic principle that a human being ought to enjoy. The expression of one through cultural convictions, language, and social practices is embodied in the Constitution.

Having said that Hon. Speaker, one has to pose a question as to whether do we all as the South African populace understand the meaning and significance of Heritage Day?

Celebrated annually on 24 September, for some, it is an opportunity to simply get together with family and friends for a braai, but does this take into account the multitude of cultures that make up our "rainbow nation"?

Heritage Day is a national holiday where all South Africans celebrate their cultural heritage and embrace their diverse traditions and values that contribute to our "rainbow nation".

During this day the nation is given an opportunity to celebrate its cultural diversity whilst at the same time affirming its country's nationhood.

People in the country have different meanings of Heritage Day:

- Heritage Day is an important public holiday as it recognises different aspects of culture and encourages South Africans across the spectrum to celebrate their cultural heritage, the diversity of their beliefs and different traditions.
- To some, Heritage not only refers to our historical inheritance, creative expression and food, but it also embraces the various languages that have become entrenched in our cultural surroundings.
- Whilst to others this is a day of celebrating cultural diversity since we have different cultures in Africa, different traditional beliefs, music, dance, food and attire. This day means a lot to us as Africans and to the new generation because we learn more about our cultures.

By assessing all the interpretation and meaning of Heritage Day, one can conclude that this day is when South Africans celebrate the diverse cultural heritage that makes up a "rainbow nation".

It is the day to celebrate the contribution of all South Africans to the building of South Africa we see and live in side-by-side today. Honourable Members, it must be said that many heroes and heroines have contributed immensely towards the rebuilding of this country.

Several astute leaders came to the fore to embrace their cultural diversity, including even that one of their people.

We owe our gratitude to the country's fallen leaders which as a nation cannot even begin to repay.

Our appreciation goes to Inkosi u-Shaka of the Zulu's, Ikosi Mabhoko and Nyabela of the Ndebele's, Hhosi Soshangane of the Tsonga's, King Moshoeshoe of the Sotho's and Inkosi Sobhuza of the Swazi's, to mention just a few.

Their gigantic contribution to the country's heritage, pride, tradition and culture is priceless.

By taking a cue and sustaining the ideals of these fore-leaders, the country can move effortlessly in promoting national identity and social cohesion.

Through interactive and collaborative engagements in a form of sport and cultural events, the social cohesion we as a country yearn for as espoused by the Constitution can be realized.

It is pleasing that today, the government of the day has enacted legislation to promote and sustain the country's historic cultures and traditions.

Beyond that, government has put in place institutions like museums, and libraries just to preserve our heritage. We dare not undermine such efforts.

As a country we ought to use the liberation heritage as a vehicle to foster social cohesion, nation building, economic development and inclusive citizenship – with a view to give true meaning to this “rainbow nation” of ours.

Despite the good achievements and all the signs that the country has reached another level in terms of cross-cultural interactions – there is still more to be done when it comes to our socio-economic appearance.

Watching a Rugby match between the Springboks and the Scotland in our backyard at the Mbombela Stadium, attending the iconic Lowveld Show just few metres from this house, and sitting side-by-side at the famous Inni-Bos Afrikaans Cultural Show, amongst others may not be enough.

Not enough in a sense that after each gathering we still go our separate ways to places where we stay as designed by the then Apartheid geography.

It is against this background that the ruling party, the government of the day and particularly the Department of Human Settlements must push in their endeavours to create an all inclusive society.

This as the department's vision outlines can be achieved though the creation of sustainable human settlements.

The new construction developments we recently announced as government are aimed at breaching the gap between people of colour, economic standing and cultural, religious, and ideological standings.

Honourable Speaker, the country has over the years moved substantially to ensure that we are indeed a country that promotes unity, while very diverse as a society.

Honourable Members, as we celebrate Heritage Month let us be mindful of the contributions made by our fallen heroes and heroines to bring us where we are today.

Without any ambiguity, they have played their part and for ours are to embrace their insurmountable feat and defend their legacy.

Stealing again from Former President Mandela, ***“with democracy, we have the opportunity to ensure that our institutions reflect history in a way that respects the heritage of all our citizens”.***

Let us all as a nation embrace our unity in diversity.

Ngiyabonga.