

WELCOMING ADDRESS BY HIS WORSHIP THE MAYOR OF ILEMBE DISTRICT MUNICIPALITY, COUNCILOR S.W. MDABE, ON THE OCCASION OF THE 150TH ANNIVERSARY COMMEMORATION HELD AT KWADUKUZA RECREATION GROUNDS, 20 NOVEMBER 2010.

Program Director,

Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, Dr Zweli Mkhize

Mayor of KwaDukuza Municipality, Cllr Thulani Khuluse,

Mayors and Deputy Mayors in our midst

Fellow councilors,

Senior Government officials,

Members of the 1860 Legacy project,

Distinguished guests,

Well wishers,

Members of the media,

Ladies and Gentlemen:

As we journey through our hard-won democracy, we have succeeded amidst the harsh realities the legacy of apartheid left behind. We forge ahead, triumphantly, without fear in our hearts knowing we have a right to our dignity, our legacy, our past, our history, culture and our heritage. We need to reclaim our history.

It is indeed a great honour and privilege ladies and gentlemen, to be part of this momentous occasion in the history of South Africa.

The State President, Jacob Zuma in his State of the Nation Address, proclaimed the formation of a number of committees working towards the celebration event of 150 years of arrival of Indian Indentured labourers in South Africa.

The gesture is a reflection of a renewed determination by Government to address racism and prejudice in society.

It reaffirms the need to pay attention to our mothers and fathers of our struggle for justice and grant them their rightful place in the history of our beloved South Africa.

We have seen it befitting to pay homage to one of the greatest human rights activist and freedom fighter who was groomed here in South Africa, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi by erecting his statue in the town of KwaDukuza.

This is part of the overarching programme for the District to ensure that we highlight the historic and cultural potential of the iLembe region, and thereby attract more investment.

Today we have gathered here to celebrate the 150th Anniversary of arrival of the Indian Indebted Labours in South Africa.

When the Indian community came to this country in 1860 November 16, they were mere slaves.

Their transformation from being labours into full citizens with equal rights of this country has a significance in the context of South African History and had a positive contribution in the liberation struggle for black people.

The distinctiveness of this event is that it reminds us of the past prejudices that we have overcome together as a people and allow us to extract relevant lessons from the past struggles for application to current reality.

In looking back we are reminded of the dire conditions under which the indentured laborers lived in; especially in Port Shepstone when they arrived in South Africa.

Such incidents, teach us to have respect for humankind; not only as a government; but as a people of this country.

In the context of Indian community living in South Africa and in the iLembe District in particular, where we live side by side with different cultures predominantly Zulu culture, it reaffirms that as South Africans we are **“united in diversity.”**

Working together with our people, we were able to transform our society into a united, non-sexist, non-racial and a democratic South Africa since 1994.

It is through this new dispensation that it is possible for the Indian community, which has a strong feeling towards their identity to organize themselves, teach one another about their history, contributions, commitment of the first Indian settlers and thus ensuring the survival of their culture, religion and legacy.

The sense of pride about one's self, which is a characteristic of the Indian community; is what the apartheid regime through its policies robbed us as black South African people. We were made to feel empty about ourselves and we were systematically losing our own identity.

Initiatives such as these are an indication that as a Nation we are on the correct path towards the realization of a society which the likes of Chief Albert Luthuli, Ahmed Kathrada, Dr Monty Naicker subscribed to, which is ***a non-sexist, non-racial and a democratic South Africa.***

The phenomenon of two different cultures living together is a constant reminder and it teaches us all to understand, tolerate and respect cultural and religious values of one another.

History confirms that this region is rich in culture and heritage.

It has been discovered through the research of various municipalities that our District has enormous potential to become a world class tourist destination.

We have therefore, put together a program, which will ensure that we highlight the historical and cultural potential of iLembe region, and thereby attract more investment, which we desperately need to change the economic outlook of our district.

Starting from last year, moving forward, each year during the period between September and October we have and shall continue to mobilize people to observe this period as a heritage season in the iLembe District.

In terms of our plan the month of October will become a hive of activities where legacies of King Shaka, Chief Albert Luthuli, General Gizenga Mpanza, Mahatma Ghandi amongst others are celebrated.

We have collaborated with stakeholders in the corporate, public sector as well as state owned enterprises to mobilize all requisite resources and logistics around such activities themed: **“Diverse people unite.”**

Last year in September, we launched a District Digital Repository on Cultural Heritage; a project linked to the National Digital Repository on Cultural Heritage coordinated by the Presidential Commission on Information Society and Development.

Through this project we aim to develop a National Digital Repository on Cultural Heritage, in order to ensure that South Africa’s culture and heritage is collected, digitized for the purpose of preservation and dissemination worldwide.

The benefit of this project is that it will holistically present the historical and cultural significance of the District, together with the four local municipalities through a joint marketing and communication strategy; using print and electronic media coupled with direct visual onsite marketing to bolster the historical and cultural –tourism potential of our region.

The celebration today is significant in that it is a constant reminder of the importance of a diverse nation united; living side by side, respecting our diverse cultures and religions towards a realization of the fundamental goal of making South Africa a country which belongs to all who live in it.

I thank you,