

21 February – World Mother Tongue Day

On 17 November 1999, UNESCO declared 21 February as International Mother Tongue Day. This day has been celebrated every year since February 2000. The purpose of this day is mainly to promote linguistic and cultural diversity as well as multilingualism. Why 21 February and not any other day? The answer to this question is simple. On this day in 1952, the Bengali Language Movement demonstrated for the recognition of the Bangla language spoken in the Dominion of Pakistan. It demanded that this language should be used as an official language in government affairs, as a medium of instruction in schools, in the media, currency, and on official stamps.

The Bengali experience mirrors that of South Africa. In June 1976, African students in Soweto demonstrated after the apartheid regime decided to make Afrikaans a compulsory language of learning in African schools. The regime was forced to reverse its decision. After independence, the democratic government recognised the nine indigenous African languages, as well as English and Afrikaans. As a result, South Africa has become a diverse country with different languages and cultures.

After declaring all eleven languages official, the government also established language committees to ensure that African languages are promoted. The PanSALB (Pan South African Language Board) was established to achieve this objective by ensuring that all indigenous African languages are promoted and spoken freely. All South Africans can now express themselves in the language of their choice.

To promote mother-tongue use, everyone is encouraged to speak their own language, to write in their own language, and to read books written in their own language. By doing so, they will be truly promoting their language, culture, and heritage. In recognising the significance of language, UNESCO declared 2019 as the International Year of Indigenous Languages, suggesting that we should celebrate and promote our languages not only for a day but for the entire year.

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21 kuNhlolanja- Usuku loLimi lweBele Emhlabeni Wonke Jikelele

Ngomhla ziyi-17 kuLwezi ngowe-1999, inhlango emele izindaba zamazwe omhlaba (UNESCO) yamemezela usuku lwangomhla zingama-21 kuNhlolanja njengosuku lolimi lwebele umhlaba wonke jikelele. Lolu suku lugujwa minyaka yonke kusukela ngonyaka wezi-2000 kuNhlolanja. Inhloso yalolu suku ukukhuthaza izilimi kanye namasiko ahlukahlukene kanjalo nobulimimningi. Kungani kwakhethwa uNhlolanja kungakhethwa olunye usuku noma enye inyanga? Impendulo kulo mbuzo isobala. Ngalolu suku ngonyaka we-1952, umbutho obizwa nge-Bengali Language Movement walwela ukugunyazwa kokusetshenziswa kolimi 'Bangla language' ukuba lukhulunywe embusweni wasePakistan. Lo mbutho wawufuna ukuthi lolu limi lusethenziswe njengolimi olusemthethweni kuhulumeni, ezikoleni, kwabezindaba, kwezezimali kanye nasezitenjini ezisemthethweni.

Okwenzeka ngolimi iBengali singakufanisa nalokhu okwenzeka kuleli lengabadi. NgoNhlanguvana kowe-1976, abafundi baseSoweto balwa belwisana nohulumeni wengcinezelo owawusugoke ulimi lwesiBhunu njengolimi okuyimpoqo ukufunda nokufundisa ngalo ezikoleni zabantu abamnyama. Ngalokho umbuso wagcina uphoqeleka ukuba usiguqule isinqumo sawo. Emuva kokuzimela kwezwe laseNingizimu Afrika, uhulumeni wentando yeningi wagunyaza ukusetshenziswa nokukhulunywa kwezilimi eziyisishiyagalolunye okuyiziLimi zoMdabu wakuleli, okufaka phakathi ulimi lwesiNgisi kanye nolwesiBhunu. Ekugcineni izwe laseNingizimu Afrika lase liba yizwe ilenezilimi eziningi kanye namasiko ahlukahlukene.

Emuva kokumenyezelwa kwezilimi eziyi-11 njengezilimi ezisemthethweni, uhulumeni wabe esesungula amakomidi ezilimi ngenhloso yokuqinisekisa ukuthi iziLimi zoMdabu ziyathuthukiswa. Inhlango ebizwa ngePanSALB (*Pan South African language Board*) yasungulwa ngenhloso yokuqinisekisa ukuthi zonke iziLimi zoMdabu ziyathuthukiswa futhi ziyakhulunywa ngokukhululeka. Bonke abantu baseNingizimu Afrika sebeyakwazi ukuzethula nokuphefumula besebenzisa ulimi abaluthandayo.

Ekukhuthazeni ukusetshenziswa kolimi lwebele, lokhu kusho ukuthi wonke umuntu kumele akhulume ulimi lwakhe, abhale ngolimi lwakhe aphinde afunde izincwadi ezibhalwe ngolimi lwakhe. Ngokwenza njalo, bayobe bethuthukisa izilimi zabo ngokwempela, okubalwa phakathi amasiko abo, kanye namagugu. Ekuqapheleni ukubaluleka kolimi, inhlango yamazwe omhlaba okuyi-UNESCO ibe isimemezela unyaka wezi-2019 njengonyaka

weziLimi zoMdabu umhlaba wonke jikelele ngenhloso yokugcizelela ukuthi kumele sigubhe siphinde sithuthukise izilimi zethu hhayi ngosuku nje kuphela kepha unyaka wonke.

Phambili ngeziLimi zoMdabu wase-Afrika phambili!

Ziqhenye ngolimi lwakho lwebele!

Leli phepha lombono libhalwe laphinde lahunyushwa nguMenzi Thango, umfundisi wolimi lwesiZulu, eMnyangweni weziLimi zoMdabu, eNyuvesi yaseFree State.