

# South African Language Rights Bulletin



## A new format for the Bulletin

Welcome to the first issue in the third volume of the South African Language Rights Bulletin (SALRB). The aim of the monthly Bulletin – in its new, more reader-friendly format – is to provide the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) with an overview of the developments on the language front in South Africa, as reflected in the country's mainstream newspapers. English- and Afrikaans-language newspaper records are drawn from the SA Media database, while Zulu records are collected from the bi-weekly *Ilanga*, as well as the daily and Sunday newspaper, *Isoleswe*.

Although the main focus is on language rights, the Bulletin also covers other language-related problems. The contentious issue of name changes in contemporary South Africa, though related to the issue of language problems, is dealt with separately. Newspaper coverage of aspects of language promotion, language research and language (rights) activism also receives attention.

Owing to the complex data-processing system of SA Media, the collection of printed media records analysed in this Bulletin is not complete; and conclusions reached are of a preliminary nature. Adjustments will be made in the corresponding annual South African Language Rights Monitor (SALRM), which will be prepared for PanSALB once the data-collection process has been completed. In the meantime, the SALRB aims to help PanSALB to remain abreast of language (rights) developments in the country.

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## Language promotion during Heritage Month

In the newspapers of September, coverage given to language materials and products, language awards and prizes, language organisations and language personalities mostly constituted promotional coverage of Afrikaans.

The *Pendoring* awards for excellence in Afrikaans advertising received a significant amount of publicity, as did the controversial Afrikaans musical *Ons vir jou* (*Beeld*, 20/09/08). Among the Afrikaans/Afrikaner organisations that featured in September's newspapers were the ATKV, which presented awards (*Woordveertjies*) for Afrikaans literature (*Burger*, 02/09/08); Solidariteit, which announced its plans for an Afrikaans technical college (*Beeld*, 15/09/08); and the SBA, which held its 16<sup>th</sup> annual meeting (*Burger*, 24/09/08). Addressing the meeting for the last time as chairperson of the organisation's council of trustees, Conrad Sidego looked back on the role played by the SBA in the empowerment of the historically disadvantaged speakers of Afrikaans.

Of the few records in the existing database for September that are concerned with the promotion of South African languages other than Afrikaans, one merits special mention. In an article for the *Mail & Guardian* (25/09/08) that can be regarded as a language appeal, Solani Ngobeni called on the government to pass a transformation charter for the publishing industry, in the same way as it had done for the financial sector. Ngobeni puts forward a strong argument that the development of African publishers – which currently produce only about 3% of the world's books – is pivotal to the realisation of the African Renaissance.

## A quiet month on the language-rights front

Language rights did not feature prominently in the newspapers of September 2008. However, the language used by a judge in a murder case led a court of appeal to conclude that the accused had not received a fair trial. According to *Beeld* (19/09/08), five appeal court judges found that the offensive way in which Justice Frans Kgomo (Judge President of the Northern Cape) had used language in order to give utterance to his views in court, suggested that he was hostile towards the two accused men, "to the extent that he could not try the case before him with a clear conscience" (*Beeld*, 19/09/08). In an unusual step, the appeal court ruled that the trial was nullified by Kgomo's linguistic and other behaviour and ordered a retrial.

### Heritage day: Reflections on language

Extract from the *City Press* (editorial comment, 21/09/08):

Wednesday marks Heritage Day [...] It is during this month that issues of culture and language receive attention. Some minority groups [have called for] mother tongue education. Those who reject the call say it is not helpful to ignore the reality that English has become the language of commerce in the country and that it also serves to unite South Africans. Sadly, English is the only non-South African language of all the official languages.

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Extract from the *Cape Argus* (column by Geraldine Goldblatt, 24/09/08):

What parents and teachers can do:

- Value your home language and English; this will lead to multilingualism that will enrich your children's lives
- Read indigenous stories to develop your children's cultural heritage
- Value multilingualism and multiculturalism
- If English is the only language that you speak in the home, encourage your child to learn some of the languages of South Africa.

## PanSALB hosts terminology conference

PanSALB made the news during September when the Board organised a conference focusing on the standardisation of technical terminology in the indigenous languages of South Africa. The aim, according to CEO Ntombenhle Nkosi, was to coordinate country-wide efforts in this field.

PanSALB also announced its plans to publish lists of technical terms with a view to, *inter alia*, promoting the use of African languages as media of instruction up to the final school year. According to Nkosi, the Board believed that Grade 12 examination papers should be available in all eleven of the country's official languages, and a business plan according to which this could be achieved had been submitted to the national Department of Education (*Rapport*, 28/09/08).

## The language issue at the University of the Free State

Unintended negative consequences of the parallel-medium language policy of the University of the Free State (UFS) were brought to light in an audit report of the Council for Higher Education. On 3 September, the *Mail and Guardian* reported that the council had found that certain language practices at the institution were derailing the process of racial integration.

The UFS also made the news when no fewer than three readers of the *Volksblad* complained in letters to the editor about the fact that the annual C.R. Swart memorial lecture was presented only in English (*Volksblad*, 04, 09, 16/09/08). The presenter, DA leader Helen Zille, was apparently not only prepared to speak in Afrikaans, but would have preferred to do so. According to her spokesperson, Frits de Klerk, the request to speak in English came from the UFS (*Volksblad*, 23/09/08).

*"We are not documenting our own stories and history; instead, we are allowing the former colonial master to do so on our behalf and then to resell it to us. Shame on us African publishers!"* (Solani Ngobeni, the South African finalist in the 2007 International Young Publisher of the Year Award, quoted in the *Mail and Guardian*, 25/09/08).

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*"Parents who want their children to be taught only in English do not realise how it would affect them. [These parents] are indoctrinated by this English thing [...] If Afrikaans could achieve what it did, so can the indigenous languages"* (PanSALB CEO Ntombenhle Nkosi quoted in *Rapport*, 28/09/08; free translation).

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*"Languages change their status and emotive connotations: Afrikaans used to be perceived as the language of the oppressor, yet in some areas, particularly of the Western Cape, it became the language of liberation. Language reflects the political status of the people who speak it"* (educationist Geraldine Goldblatt quoted in the *Cape Argus*, 24/09/08).

## Changing of place names – old and new

During September 2008, (proposed) changes to place names in South Africa received prominent coverage in the printed media. Early in the month, the Greater Sekhukhune District Municipality announced that the names of towns in the district – including those of Marble Hall and Groblersdal – had been earmarked for change, and that R1.2 million had been set aside for the project (*Beeld*, 08/09/08).

However, the vast majority of the collection of records concerning name changes dealt specifically with changes to street names. In Johannesburg, the city council decided to rename 16 streets – including the historic Market Street and Main Reefs Road – after struggle icon Albertina Sisulu (*Star*, 10/09/08). In Soweto, the Old Potchefstroom Road was renamed after former MK commander Chris Hani, despite objections that the Chris Hani-Baragwanath Hospital is situated along that road (*City Press*, 07/09/08). According to newspaper reports, the renaming of streets in Cape Town and Kimberley was behind schedule (*Cape Times*, 08/09/08; *Diamond Fields Advertiser*, 17/09/08).

## Renaming of Mangosuthu Highway suspended

Changes to street names in the eThekweni metropolitan municipality, the majority of which were intended to honour ANC heroes, continued to make the headlines during September. One of the most controversial cases, it will be recalled, was the renaming of the Mangosuthu Highway in Umlazi after slain ANC activist Griffiths Mxenge. As noted in the Bulletin of June 2008, activist endeavours by the IFP to prevent this name change included two protest marches and threats of further violence (*Citizen*, 05/09/08). Early in September, however, the ANC's provincial executive committee in KwaZulu-Natal intervened and "agreed to put on hold the process of renaming the Umlazi highway [...] to ensure peace in the province" (*Sowetan*, 03/09/08). According to the *Mail & Guardian* (25/09/08) and other commentators, this step might have had "less to do with inter-party reconciliation and more to do with not giving the IFP a platform on which to mobilise ahead of [the 2009] election".

Yet more than 100 other street-name changes in the greater Durban area went ahead. A number of street signs bearing the new names were defaced soon after being erected. Opting for a law-abiding form of activism, the DA and the IFP lodged a joint high court application to set aside the name changes. Both parties argued that the renaming process was flawed and divisive, not least because more than 32 000 objections had been ignored (*Mail & Guardian*, 25/09/08).

### Gauteng hospitals renamed

The Johannesburg General Hospital →  
*Charlotte Maxeke Johannesburg Academic Hospital*

Maxeke (1874-1939) graduated with a bachelor of science degree in Wilberforce, Ohio, in 1905. The African Methodist Episcopal Church elected her president of the Women's Missionary Society and by 1919 she was active in the anti-pass-laws demonstrations. This led to the founding of the Bantu Women's League, which became part of the ANC Women's League.

The Coronation Hospital →  
*Rahima Moosa Mother and Child Hospital*

At a young age Moosa (1922-1993) became the shop steward for the Canning Workers' Union and was later elected as the union's branch secretary. She joined the South African Communist Party and spoke out against the plight of women workers – particularly African women, who were forced to carry passes.

The Pretoria Academic Hospital →  
*Steve Biko Academic Hospital*

Biko (1946-1977) was an anti-apartheid activist who founded the Black Consciousness Movement. As a young medical student, he formed the South African Students' Organisation. Despite being banned by the apartheid government, Biko continued his political activities. He was arrested on August 18 1977. On September 12 1977 he died in police custody.

(*Star*, 30/09/08)

## The end of Voortrekkers Road(s) in Pretoria/Tshwane?

Still awaiting a final decision by Arts and Culture Minister Pallo Jordan regarding the proposed renaming of Pretoria, the Tshwane Metro Council embarked on another name-changing project. On 11 September 2008, a year after it had raised the issue for the first time, the council announced that it had earmarked 27 Pretoria/Tshwane streets for name changes.

Claiming that the colonial and apartheid connotations of the existing street names were offensive, council speaker Khorombi Dau called upon residents and other stakeholders to propose new names, preferably “those of people who had contributed to the liberation struggle; who had contributed to the freedom of the country; who had contributed to the struggle for gender equality or had been cultural activists” (*Pretoria News*, 18/09/08; cf. also *Beeld*, *Citizen*, *Pretoria News*, 12/09/08).

A series of hearings allowing for public participation had been scheduled for 17 October 2008 (*Citizen*, 23/09/08). However, those enraged by the council’s plans – including the DA, the FF+ and virtually every Afrikaans/Afrikaner organisation – would not wait until then to voice their objections. Before the end of September, a group called Action Pretoria Street Names (APS) was established for the specific purpose of coordinating protest action. Petitions, demonstrations and legal action were considered. Spearheaded by AfriForum, the 47-member-strong APS opposed the street renaming process on the following grounds:

- the cultural historical heritage of South Africa’s communities deserved to be protected;
- public opinion had not been tested before the decision was taken to change the street names;
- the renaming process would be divisive;
- R1 billion of taxpayers’ money (one estimation of the cost) could be better spent – on service delivery, for example; and
- while changing street names would *cause* confusion, naming Pretoria’s 14 000 unnamed streets would *clear up* confusion

(*Rapport*, 21/09/08; *Beeld*, 22/09/08).

### Earmarked for change in the capital

#### *Street names associated with the Voortrekkers and the ZAR:*

Andries Street  
 Beatrix Street  
 Charles Street  
 Church Street  
 Duncan Street  
 Esselen Street  
 General Louis Botha Drive  
 Jacob Maré Street  
 Mears Street  
 Michael Brink Street  
 Mitchell Street  
 Paul Kruger Street  
 Potgieter Street  
 Pretorius Street  
 Prinsloo Street  
 Proes Street  
 Schoeman Street  
 Schubart Street  
 Skinner Street  
 Van der Walt Street  
 Vermeulen Street  
 Voortrekkers Road  
 Walker Street

#### *Street names with an apartheid connotation:*

D.F. Malan Drive  
 Hans Strijdom Drive  
 Hendrik Verwoerd Drive  
 Leah Mangope Drive  
 Lucas Mangope Drive

#### *Other streets:*

Queen Wilhelmina Drive  
 Zambesi Drive

(*Beeld*, 17/09/08)

## Action Pretoria Street Names: A campaign in red

The proposed renaming of 27 Pretoria/Tshwane streets prompted some dramatic activist initiatives, all of which received coverage in both the Afrikaans- and the English-language press:

- The FF+ presented a bouquet of 27 red tulips to the Dutch Ambassador to South Africa, together with a memorandum which called upon the Royal Netherlands Embassy to challenge the proposed street-name changes. The request was turned down (*Beeld*, 17/09/08; *Pretoria News*, 17/09/09).
- The far-right Boerevolk Freedom Foundation started a campaign which entailed tying red ribbons around the street signs that were to come down (*Pretoria News*, 17/09/09; *Beeld*, 18/09/08). The organisation also staged a demonstration at Church Square during which the blood of cattle was sprinkled to signal a “Boer cultural genocide” (*Beeld*, 23/09/08; *Citizen*, 23/09/08).

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