

South African writers' symposium 2010 Centre for the Book

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South African writers, novice and renowned, from all over the country, gathered earlier this year for a symposium which was held at the Centre for the Book (CFB) in Cape Town. Publishers, librarians, tertiary institutions, government departments, editors, illustrators and translators were all part of this remarkable gathering which took place on 4-5 March 2010.

Exhibitions by the National Library of South Africa (NLSA), NF Saliwa Publishing, Maskew Miller Longman, MacMillan Publishers, Nasou Via Afrika, ANFASA, New Readers Publishers and the Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport added to the event in the CFB's committee room. The formal part of the programme, directed by Mandla Matyumza, executive head of the Centre for the Book, started on a very high note with inspiring speeches by speakers, among whom John KTsebe, chief executive officer and national librarian of NLSA, who welcomed all the delegates.

The keynote address was delivered by professor Muxe Nkondo, chairperson of the NLSA board. In his address he highlighted the challenges that our country is still facing after 16 years of democracy: ignorance, deprivation, poverty, squalor, violence and diseases. He emphasised the vital role writers could play in addressing these social ills. Poets Amanda Nodada and Winslow Schalkwyk rendered poetry items in-between speeches.

The symposium was graced by the laureate himself, professor Koerapetse Kgositsile, who was given an opportunity to share his writing and publishing experience with the delegates.

This one-and-a-half day conference was divided into sessions where presenters on different interesting topics maintained the momentum of the event. In the first session, facilitated by Beaula Stofile of the Western Cape Department of Cultural Affairs and Sport, literature expert Dr Sindiwe Magona presented the topic *Writing in your mother tongue*. She emphasised the issue of non-English speakers who keep on writing in English. Mr Jay Heale, with his topic *Writing for today's readers*, also shared his experience in children's literature and strongly stressed that writers for South African children should consider local content rather than be copycats. Another panel member was Reinette

Popplestone from the University of Cape Town. Her presentation was on *The importance of Braille as a reading and writing system*. She asserted that Braille is under threat and that schools for the blind are always situated on the outskirts of towns.

The second session, facilitated by Dr Elda Lyster from Kwa-Zulu Natal, had as panel members Mandla Buthelezi from Nasou Via Afrika and Siphiso Mahala from the National Department of Arts and Culture (DAC). Buthelezi's topic was *Marketing books in South Africa* and he emphasised the importance of researching, planning and budgeting. Mahala captivated the audience with his topic, *Audience development and enhancing the reading culture*. He encouraged reading from the early ages, and further suggested the establishment of writers' groups and the consolidation of national reading programmes.

The last session of the day was facilitated by Boniwe Molupi from Free State Library Services. Sharing the stage with her was Nicol Faseen from the Publishers' Association of South Africa (PASA) whose topic was on *e-publishing*. He made mention of e-publishing as being cost-effective and offering new opportunities and benefits for debut authors.

Kundayi Masanzu from the Academic and Non-Fiction Authors' Association of South Africa (ANFASA) kept the participants intrigued by presenting his views on copyright and royalties when he stated that writers should understand the contract and its terms well.

Last but not least was Magret Kibido from NLSA whose presentation was on the use of the International Standard Book Number (ISBN) in publishing. She made it clear that anything published must have an ISBN which is only issued by the NLSA.

Delegates were offered opportunities to engage with presenters through questions and discussion in all the sessions.

The last session of the day ended by having delegates divided into four groups to discuss four different topics.

Day two, facilitated by Dr Nomfundo Mali, the Western Cape Provincial Manager from the Pan South African Language Board (PanSALB) consisted mainly of plenary meetings where group representatives gave reports on their discussion topics. The symposium was closed by the summation read by Nombulelo Baba from the Centre for the Book.

Note: In this issue we publish one of the papers delivered by Siphiso Mahala on the importance of cultivating a culture of reading in South Africa.

