



LET THE SPIRIT OF
LUTHULI SPEAK TO ALL

Official Welcome – Ms Sibongile Masuku Van Damme Chairperson of the Luthuli Museum Council

I would like to take this opportunity to welcome everyone here today to the Luthuli Museum and the start of the 4th Commonwealth Association of Museums GCAM workshop. It is especially pleasing that the GCAM workshop is being held this year at the Luthuli Museum – a site that resounds with cultural and historical significance. Chief Albert Luthuli was not only the longest-serving president of the African National Congress and Africa's first Nobel Peace Laureate but he was also a leader who, through his words and deeds, left a valuable legacy for South Africa. His unflinching commitment to non-violence, non-racialism, democracy and women's rights and his selfless service, sacrifice and humility should serve as an example to our youth and our society in general. Leaders such as Chief Albert Luthuli gave true meaning to the concept of *ubuntu* and subsequently provided us with a greater sense of our identity within society both individually and collectively. His selfless contribution to formal and community education is little spoken of yet it forms a great part of the sum package of what he left us in the form of freedom. Albert Luthuli taught IsiZulu and Music at Adams College for 13 years, where he was also responsible for outreach in the community schools that Adams College served. One of the political giants of South Africa Z.K. Matthews said that Luthuli was a meticulous teacher who demanded excellence from his students. Luthuli was the secretary of the South African Teachers Association and later became its president. His daughter Albertina Luthuli says that "Education was his passion and fighting for freedom was his life." She recalls a moment walking with her father to a bus station and when they spotted children playing during school hours he said; "Who knows, amongst these children herding cattle we might be looking at an Einstein who is not allowed to rise to his best because of poverty and because of poverty there are so many Einstein's that cease to be."

In lieu of the theme for the workshop this year, that being *Children and Culture*, and how African Museums can use culture for the development of children and youth, it is fitting that I emphasise the vital importance for the youth of today to know and understand their communities', country's and continent's history, so as to be empowered

to make a positive difference. The importance of culture in providing us with a sense of identity and purpose is often underestimated. Museums can and must play a pivotal role in encouraging an understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. Museums must bring to the fore not only indigenous knowledge systems but also must reflect the dynamic changes and interchanges within the cultural milieu of our communities and society. This can be done through such ventures as understanding how culture is expressed in all forms, such as song, dance, drama, fine arts and literature. Through the use of culture, both traditional and contemporary, the youth of today can be aided in developing a positive and culturally tolerant outlook on life, and can become aware of the dangers of misinformation or prejudiced teachings.

The manner in which museums were introduced in Africa positioned them as tourist outlets. This yanked museum content out of the space within which it was formed and represented. I am asking your gathering today that it places museums back into the spaces, cultures and the lives of people from which they reside. Museums cannot be islands in space but must be re-integrated into communities. As long as museums do not recognise that they play a custodianship role for a community's cultural capital and that they must bring the voices of those they represent into the fore; they will remain white elephants.

The youth should begin to define part of the agenda of museums. We know that if one communicates to you in a language that you do not understand you will hear but will not understand what they are saying. As a museum professional or educator, if you are not tweeting, are not on facebook, have no website, are not sending texts or sms messages, then you are out of touch with the youth. As much as some of these mediums might not be in reach of children in rural areas, the youth in rural areas still want to be part of this technology. Let us not only seek to be heard but seek to be understood through dialoguing.

Tomorrow, this day, this welcome, this speech will be the past. This day has come so that it may end. We are creating the past as we talk. In partnership with the youth let us create a past that they will own, be proud of and bring out its best for their children. We were not part of the agenda when the museums we are talking about were created up until the mid 1990s. Today we are being constantly asked to develop a culture of visiting, appreciating and utilising them, and to inculcate such a culture amongst our youth.

This workshop will aid towards the development of children's programmes in African museums with an emphasis on utilising the museum's skills and knowledge of local conditions and culture to work creatively within communities. By involving youth in museums and creating an awareness of the cultural and historical value that museums bring to communities, the youth of today can gain an appreciation of the past and this can thereafter be used in understanding their own identities and in creating meaning within their own lives. Furthermore, youth will develop an appreciation for museums as sites for the conservation, study and reflection of heritage and culture.

Our task here over the next few days is to think about culture and how this can be used in the positive development of children and youth. Culture is all around us, "it is the storehouse of ways in which we create a meaningful world" (Muller, 1988). Museums can help in creating a positive, moral-based culture and this is especially important in today's

world, which is bombarded by unhealthy and morally weak images and ideas presented everyday in the media that have a negative effect on our youth. Finally, successful development involves active steps towards integrating cultural values in new and dynamic ways and I am pleased to see that through this workshop positive steps will be made in this direction.

I trust that your experience here over the next four days will be fruitful, insightful, and will lead to further constructive endeavours in creating culturally tolerant and understanding youth with a respect and sense of pride for communities' historical legacies and the value and importance of museums as custodians of culture and heritage.

It would be terribly wrong of me not to invite the spirit of the giant of our times Albert Luthuli and his wife who gave their lives so that we can have the freedom we South Africans hold in our hands to join us. As the logo of the museum says – Let the spirit of Luthuli speak to all. Luthuli speak to us and guide us as we converge here on this soil you gave us.

Thank you