

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

22nd MAY 2023

AT THE
OCCASION OF THE NATIONAL
COMMEMORATION OF THE AFRICAN
LANGUAGES WEEK AND THE
MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY LAUNCH



BY
HON ADVOCATE J.F.N.
MUDENDA
(SPEAKER OF
PARLIAMENT)

AT NATIONAL LANGUAGE
INSTITUTE MIDLANDS
STATE UNIVERSITY
GWERU, ZIMBABWE





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Preface

This speech was delivered as a Keynote Address on the occasion of the launch of commemorations for African Languages Week and International Mother Language Day. The event was held at the Midlands State University under the auspices of the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation in partnership with the Midlands State University's National Language Institute as a precursor to the National Culture Month that was set to be launched by His Excellency, President Dr Emmerson Dambudzo Mnangagwa on 27th May 2023. It is instructive that language is a storehouse and vehicle of culture as acclaimed by SADC, AU, UN, UNESCO and other international organisations. The commemorations of the National Languages Week and National Culture Month come after the Ministry successfully set up the National Languages Advisory Committee and consummately hosted the inaugural National Languages Indaba in Victoria Falls City in June 2022.

In 2023, the Ministry has lined-up several activities aimed at acknowledging, mainstreaming, validating and valorising the sixteen officially recognised languages of Zimbabwe and those yet to be officially elevated by the Constitution. Key amongst these planned activities is the commemoration of continentally and internationally acclaimed language and culture days. The Third Specialised Technical Committee on Youth, Culture and Sport of the African Union's Academy of African Languages (ACALAN) resolved in October 2018 in Algiers, Algeria, that all AU Member States would celebrate the African Languages Week from 24th-30th January 2023. Owing to logistical reasons, the celebrations in Zimbabwe were deferred to May 2023. The celebrations were guided by the theme: **“African Languages for Sustainable Food Security, Cultural and Socio-economic Development for the Africa We Want.”** The theme has three subthemes which are:

- i. African languages and nutrition for better education;
- ii. African languages and mass mobilisation for food security; and
- iii. African languages for the cultural food economy.

The slogan for the year is; **“#What We Speak and What We Eat Make Africa Great.”** As was espoused at the National Languages Indaba, all citizens of Zimbabwe are challenged to use indigenous languages to promote unity, development, human rights and national cultural identity to achieve linguistic pluralism.



THE HON SPEAKER J.F.N MUDENDA AND DEPUTY MINISTER OF YOUTH, SPORT, ARTS AND RECREATION, HON T. MACHAKAIRE FOLLOWING PROCEEDINGS IN PREPARATION TO CUT THE RIBBON AT THE LAUNCH OF THE COMMEMORATIONS OF THE AFRICAN LANGUAGES WEEK AND THE INTERNATIONAL MOTHER LANGUAGE DAY LAUNCH



THE HON SPEAKER OF PARLIAMENT SHARING A LIGHTER MOMENT WITH THE MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY SENIOR ADMINISTRATION STAFF

The Minister of State for Provincial Affairs and Devolution for Midlands - Hon. L. Mavima.

The Minister for Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation – Hon K. Coventry.

The Deputy Minister for Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation – Hon. T. Machakaire and all the Honourable Deputy Ministers here present.

ZANU PF Politburo Secretary for Gender and Culture – Hon. T. Mukusha and all other members of the Politburo and Revolutionary ZANU PF Party here present.

Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committees on Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation – Hon M. Tongofa.

Chairperson of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committees on Primary and Secondary Education – Hon. T. Moyo.

The Vice – Chancellor of the Midlands State University – Professor V.N. Muzvidziwa.

Secretary for the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation – Dr. T. Chitepo and other Permanent Secretaries here present.

Members of the Chiefs Council of Zimbabwe and Traditional Leadership here present.

Director of the National Language Institute – Prof W. Magwa and all members of the Academia.

Senior Government Officials here present.

Esteemed Members of the National Languages Advisory Committee and the National Intangible Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee.

African Indigenous Languages experts and representatives.

Cultural and Legal experts here present.

Civic Organizations and Cultural and Creative Industry players.

Members of the Media Fraternity.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

From the onset, allow me to congratulate the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation for organising the celebration of National Languages Week in the context of commemorating also the International Mother Language Day although outside the initially set African Union's dates of 24th – 30th January 2023 as designated by the African Academy of Languages (ACALAN) of the African Union. The African Languages Week observance is a precursor of the National Culture Month to be climaxed by our Head of State and Government, President Dr. E. D. Mnangagwa, in Binga on 27th May 2023. Let me also congratulate the trailblazing Midlands State University which houses the National Language Institute for hosting this auspicious event. The National Languages Institute is now the uncontested torch bearer in our national quest for the growth and development of our indigenous languages as pioneered by the affable and indefatigable Professor Magwa under the leadership of Vice Chancellor Professor Muzvidziwa.

As we commemorate the National Languages Week in the context of celebrating the International Mother Language Day, the theme for the commemoration, namely, **“African Languages for Sustainable Food Security, Cultural and Socio-Economic Development for the Africa We Want”** is most propitious. It is also intriguing for me in respect of its envisioned implementability, especially when we desire that words must mean what they say and say what they mean. To that an extent, we need to contextualise the theme within the historical antecedent of Africa's colonisation which stunted the flourishing of African languages. The Berlin Conference of 15th November 1884 lasting up to 26th February 1885, also known as the Congo Conference or West Africa Conference, carved Africa into cake like pieces of colonies under the bondage of the respective colonisers. Consequently, it created the current untenable regional linguistic clusters which continue to preponderate in usage over Africa's indigenous languages. This is the bane of our African languages' growth and development. Thus, the commemoration of the African Languages Week and that of the International Mother Languages Day evokes the need for the renaissance of African Languages spurred by several conferences and declarations over the years as undergirded by UNESCO and the

then Organisation of African Unity Charter (now the African Union Charter) such as the following:-

- The Pan-African Cultural Manifesto of Algiers (1969).
- The Inter-Governmental Conference on Cultural Policies in Africa, organised by UNESCO in Accra (1975), in cooperation with the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union).
- The Cultural Charter for Africa, with special reference to Part I Article 1(a) and (b), Article 2(a), Part III Article 6.1(a), 2(b) and Part V Articles 17-19.
- The Lagos Plan of Action (1980) for the Economic Development of Africa.
- The Final Report (27th April, 1982) of UNESCO'S Meeting of Experts on the "Definition of a Strategy for Promotion of African Languages".
- The Harare Declaration on Language Policies in Africa (17th to 19th March 1987).
- The African Conference on the Integration of African Languages and Cultures into Education, Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso, 20-22 January 2010.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

All the above conferences and declarations attest to the urgent need for African Languages to assert their sovereign linguistic application in both the private and public sectors. However, we the proponents of these languages must fully appreciate the nature of language as a phenomenon that must be cogently understood in its nuances vis-à-vis its interrelatedness in defining our culture, heritage and personhood - UBUNTU-HUNHU. Otherwise, it will be impossible to unravel the theme of our celebration. Nevertheless, I should applaud the objectives of this celebrations which include:-

- 1. To celebrate and reflect on the values of Zimbabwe's Indigenous Languages during the National Languages Week which is coinciding with the National Culture Month and the International Mother Language Day within the African Union's propagation of the growth and development of African languages;***
- 2. To increase awareness and appreciation of the African Languages by***

Indeed, our languages are the epicentre of defining our humanity, personhood and our celebrated cultural heritage. That is why several international, continental and regional protocols and agreements affirm the sacrosanct status of indigenous languages. These include,

- 1 The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which recognizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and develop their languages and exude their cultural heritage.
2. The UNESCO Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity which espouses the respect for multilingualism and ethnolinguistic pluralism.
3. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) on Indigenous Peoples Policy which promotes the rights of indigenous peoples to self-determination, cultural integrity and sustainable development. The policy also recognizes the value of indigenous knowledge systems and calls for their integration into development programmes.
4. The United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues which promotes the rights of indigenous peoples, including the right to maintain and develop their languages and indigenous knowledge systems.

To buttress the above United Nations Protocols, in 1997, Zimbabwe hosted the UNESCO Conference in collaboration with the Intergovernmental Conference on Language Policies in Africa (ICLPA), which resulted in the Harare Declaration affirming that:

- Each country should formulate an inclusive Language Policy.
- Guidelines for Language Policy formulation should be sanctioned by legislative action for ease of legal enforceability.
- Every country's policy framework should be flexible enough to allow each community to use its language side-by-side with other languages while at the same time giving provision for multilingualism.
- A language policy formulating and monitoring body/institution should be

established within each country (UNESCO 1997).

In this regard, the African Union developed thereafter several protocols aimed at promoting the preservation and promotion of indigenous languages and knowledge systems. One of the key protocols in this regard is the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The protocol recognizes the right of every child to receive education in their mother tongue. This is a salient protocol which acknowledges the pedagogical and psychological need to use the mother tongue in the teaching and learning of pupils during their primary education as it covers critical formative years of the learners.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

Irrefutably, there is an inextricable link between our African languages and sustainable food security, cultural and socio-economic development for the Africa we want. In this regard, Africa must extol the linguistic usage and application of our African languages because they are the lifeblood of communicating information and ideas as well as being the vector that defines African humanity and its cultural heritage in the humanity and its cultural heritage in the matrix of sustainable food sovereignty in the quest for Africa's socio-economic development as ensconced on cultural lived experience of Africans. Today, global economies are knowledge driven. The driver of that knowledge is language. It is, therefore, axiomatic that African languages be employed in advancing new technologies, mechanisation and appropriate farming practices which enhance production and productivity in order to achieve food security in Africa anchored on the people's respected customs and beliefs regarding the spirituality of land tenure - the African Cultures' reverence of land husbandry. To that an extent, the national socio-economic development agenda will find traction with the African populace. In the same spirit, the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals translated into African languages can be better understood by Africans as they make it possible for them to realise their socio-economic rights. Equally, sustainable food security premises, inter alia, the right to life, health and a clean environment. These rights can only be appreciated if the Constitution is written in native languages.

That is why our Government deemed it proper to translate the Constitution into all the native 14 officially recognised languages courtesy of the Midlands State University's National Language Institute. Further, the National Development Strategy 1 (NDS1) has also equally been translated in compliance with Articles 643, 651 and 760 of the NDS1 in Chapter 8 so that all citizens can appreciate and participate intelligently in advancing the national development agenda. However, and more palpably, for Zimbabweans to become stockholders and stakeholders of the development agenda. As a member of the African Union, Zimbabwe would be a shining example in contributing towards food sovereignty, culture and socio-economic development informed by the Africa Agenda 2063 and the Africa Continental Free Trade Area Agreement. That is why our President, Dr. E. D. Mnangagwa's mantra – *“Nyika inovakwa igotongwa nevene vayo/ Ilizwe lakhiwa libuswe ngabaninibalo”* is the most eloquent testimony of the people's stewardship of the national development agenda.

In this regard, the observations by the late Kofi Annan, the former United Nations Secretary General, becomes instructive when he opines thus:

“Language is the key to sustainable development. By speaking the local language, we can build trust, inspire confidence, and promote understanding. This is especially important in agriculture, where clear communication can make all the difference.”

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen

The mere translation of the National socio-economic development agenda is no guarantee for Africa's economic prosperity. The people's mindset must be attuned to their African psychological and philosophical template of motivation encapsulated in their proverbial idioms. Take these examples from the Shona and

IsiNdebele languages:

- ***CHITVA CHIRI MURUTSOKA OR KURE KWEGAVA
NDOKUSINA MUTSUBVU.***

- ***OHAMBAYO NGUYE OKUBEKHAYO OR INDUKU ENHLE IGANYULA EZIZWENI.***

For our vernacular languages to be able to help citizens achieve sustainable food sovereignty, cultural consummation and socio-economic development for the Africa we want, we have to urgently put in place the following:-

- 1 A sound National Language Policy which accommodates multilingualism and ethnolinguistic pluralism where no one language is overbearing over other languages so that linguistic equity and justice are tenable.
2. A Language Act must be promulgated in order to legally buttress the National Language Policy.
3. A robust Language Board which is inclusive should be established urgently.
4. A Publishing House should be immediately established at the National Language Institute to effect the following:-
 - 4.1 Publish dictionaries for all officially recognised indigenous languages.
 - 4.2 Publish disaggregated textbooks and literature books to be used from Grade 1 to tertiary levels.
 - 4.3 A Media House to be established at the National Language Institute for language and cultural heritage programmes broadcasting.
5. Ministries of Primary and Secondary Education should embark on rigorous curriculum development for the entire education sector in respect of the officially recognised indigenous languages.
6. Universities and Colleges should embark on systematic research on the growth and development of the officially recognised indigenous languages more than what they are doing now.
7. Concerted efforts should be put in place to train qualified teachers to teach

NDOKUSINA MUTSUBVU.

- ***OHAMBAYO NGUYE OKUBEKHAYO OR INDUKU ENHLE IGANYULA EZIZWENI.***

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- 7 Concerted efforts should be put in place to train qualified teachers to teach

the officially recognised indigenous languages at all levels of our education sector.

8. Internally and externally, resource mobilisation strategies should be undertaken in order to have sufficient funding and ancillary resources for the implementation of the multilingual and multicultural education policy as well as propping up the National Language Policy.

I conclude by reminding all of us about the Biblical admonition in Genesis 11:1-9 when the Tower of Babel was being constructed. The Lord confused the languages of the people to an extent that the construction stalled and people were scattered all over the earth. In the same vein, it is instructive to note that when a nation or a continent fails to develop its languages, cultures and heritage, it will become scattered across the face of the earth with a possibility of extinction. We ought, therefore, to preserve our indigenous languages, cultures and heritage in a manner that will promote sustainable food security, cultural and socio-economic development for the Africa we want although I prefer the Africa we need. The Africa we want is ephemeral and yet the Africa we need is grounded on ethos. Indeed, it is up to us to rescue our indigenous languages and knowledge systems from the island of obscurity to the sea of relevance.

May I take this opportunity to tender my deepest commendations to the Ministry of Youth, Sport, Arts and Recreation for convening such a critical assembly as I wish you all a memorable commemoration and celebration of the African Languages Week and the International Mother Language Day despite being belated. Better late than never! It is now my singular honour and privilege to declare the commemoration of the African Languages Week and the International Mother Language Day launch officially open.

TWALUMBA LOKO!!!

TATENDA !!!

SIYABONGA!!!

I THANK YOU!!



The Hon Speaker J.F.N Mudenda is shown a braille machine at the National Language Institute

Professor Magwa, Executive Director National Language Institute shows the Honourable Speaker publications of the National Language Institute in various languages



A Golden miniature of the new Parliament Building



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