

KEY-NOTE ADDRESS BY GAUTENG PREMIER DAVID MAKHURA ON THE OCCASION OF THE GAUTENG PROVINCIAL CONFERENCE OF THE ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT PUBLISHERS AT THE PARKTONIAN HOTEL, BRAAMFONTEIN.

18 August 2015

Programme director,

The Deputy President of the Association of Independent Publishers (AIP) and Gauteng Board Member, Mr Moses Moyo,

Members of the Board of AIP,

The Executive Director, Ms Louise Vale,

Member publications of AIP,

The management and staff of AIP,

Conference delegates,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Thank you for inviting us to address the provincial conference of the Association of Independent Publishers.

This conference brings together men and women who play a critical role in promoting true diversity and pluralism in our country's media landscape.

Gathered at this conference are the faces and voices of grassroots independent print media.

Member publications of AIP provide an important channel that allows the voice of our communities, especially the poor and marginalised as well as those in the rural areas, to be heard.

Through your weekly, fortnightly and monthly publications that reach over 20 million readers across the length and breadth country, you are enabling our communities to tell and share their unique stories, often in their own languages.

By reporting on issues close to the hearts and minds of community members, you have become a trusted partner in advancing community development. You are providing an important platform for community members to deliberate on and shape their own future.

Many of you have built intimate relationships with your readership and the communities you serve. You have become their number one and trusted source of local news and information.

Through your work you are making a valuable contribution in fostering greater understanding and appreciation among community members. You bring communities together; often reminding them of the things they like and appreciate about their areas.

You provide a unique and perhaps more informed perspective on the community issues you cover because many of you live among the communities you report on.

Programme director, it is against this background that in our view we feel independent grassroots publications provide not only a new services but also more importantly a critical public service.

We, therefore, view grassroots independent publications as our partners in the dissemination of news and information.

Your readiness to report on stories considered insignificant or not news worthy by the mainstream media has cemented your place as an important alternative voice that enriches our media landscape.

You are our partner as we strive towards the target we have set for ourselves in the National Development Plan of ensuring 100% access to reliable information by 2030.

Through your publications, many of you play an activist role in the communities that you report on; ensuring that burning issues affecting communities receive the attention they deserve from the authorities.

On this important occasion, we wish to applaud the work you do to keep our communities informed and for adding to the diversity of our media landscape.

The role you play in the development of our society can never be overemphasised.

To us, independent grassroots media is the life blood of our democracy. It is also a key feature of the information age we find ourselves in.

Programme director, this conference is taking place when all indications are that print media readership continues to decline, especially among the upper- to middle-classes in South Africa. This trend is similar to developments in Europe.

However, those of us gathered here today should draw comfort from the reality that newspaper readership continues to grow amongst the working class, which are the major consumers of your publications.

This conference is also taking place at a time when, once again, debate is raging in our country about the extent to which our media has transformed as well as the extent of its diversity.

We trust that this conference will spend time deliberating on these important issues.

What is clear, though, is that 21 years into our freedom and democracy, we still have a long way to go towards our goal of universal access to reliable information, including in poor and rural areas.

In particular, we still have significant ground to cover in terms of the use of indigenous languages to disseminate news and information.

According to the South African Audit of Circulation, of the 29 commercial newspapers we have in our country, only a handful are written in languages other than English. In addition, most of those written in languages other than English are regionally based.

We are encouraged that no less than 87 AIP member publications publish in indigenous languages or publish in a combination of an indigenous as well as English or Afrikaans.

We also have a long way to go in terms of diversifying ownership of the mainstream media.

As we know, the South African media landscape has, for many years, been dominated by the four big media houses: Media24, Caxton, Times Media and Independent News and Media SA, which has now been taken over by Sekunjalo Independent Media in 2013. Media24 alone owns 40% of the media market in our country.

Equally and as pointed out in 2013 by the Print and Digital Media Transformation Task Team, the media industry has failed to transform itself sufficiently according to broad-based black economic empowerment guidelines, particularly in the areas of ownership, management and control as well as skills development and employment equity.

What these developments indicate is that we have, in our country, an untransformed monopoly that dominates our media landscape!

It is our view that this situation cannot be left on its own to self-correct.

Unattended, this situation will perpetuate the reality that in our country a small number of companies control the means to information production and dissemination.

This monopoly in our media space also means that the fundamental right of all citizens, including the poor and marginalised, to receive information and take part in its production is severely curtailed.

Programme director, our insistence on media diversity and pluralism should not be confused as an attempt to censor and restrict media freedom as well as freedom of speech.

Our aim, rather, is to ensure diversity of reportage and opinion in our media landscape and to move away from a situation where news and information production is concentrated in the hands of an elite few.

In our view, news and information cannot be viewed only as a commodity but also and most importantly as a public good. It must be accessible and used for the benefit of all.

We are raising all of these points, once more, to indicate that ensuring diversity and supporting the emergence of alternative voices in our media industry remains a strategic imperative.

Member publications of the Association of Independent Publishers have a critical role to play in helping us entrench media diversity in our country as well as in the pursuit of the noble goal of *“letting a hundred flowers blossom and a hundred schools of thought contend”*.

We agree fully with the words of the former president of the People’s Republic of China, who said: *“Diversity in the world is the basic characteristic of the human society and also the key condition for a lively and dynamic world we see today.”*

Programme director, a significant number of the member publications of AIP are found in our townships.

On this important occasion, we wish to make a commitment that as part of our programme to revitalise township economies - where we are transforming our townships into sustainable nodes of economic activity as well as vibrant cultural and intellectual spaces, we will strengthen support for township-based publications and media outlets.

We will also continue to encourage provincial departments and government agencies to invest a substantial amount of their advertising spend on grassroots independent publications.

We are doing all of this as part of our on-going commitment to deepening media diversity and pluralism; to let a 100 flowers blossom and a 10 schools of thought contend, and to give rise to conditions that will make ours a lively and dynamic society.

We look forward to working with you as we make our media more reflective of the many views and perspectives that make up our society.

I wish you a successful conference.

Thank you.