

**SPEECH BY: PROF. PHYLLUS ZUNGU AT THE RECEPTION IN HONOUR OF  
THE NATIONAL ARTS COUNCIL DURING THE GRAHAMSTOWN  
NATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL (29 JUNE 2008)**

Programme director, distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen.

Allow me to start by extending my sincere gratitude for the invitation extended to the NAC to give address on this important occasion. To this end the National Arts Council is once more proud to be associated with the Grahamstown National Arts Festival.

The National Arts Council has over the past seven years proudly supported the Festival precisely because we believe that this festival offers a great opportunity to fulfill part of our mandate and also an opportunity for us to assess the level of transformation within the sector.

Just three days ago, my fellow council member Mr Mduduzi Xakaza was launching a development programme at the Fringe Festival which is called "Hands on Mask off". This programme forms part of the strategic partnerships between the NAC and the Festival and it is aimed at capacitating the participants of the Fringe Festival with management and administration skills in a form of series of workshops and seminars.

Before I proceed, may I take this opportunity to acknowledge the presence of my fellow Council members and Staff members. On the Council side we have Mr Mduduzi Xakaza; Ms Thoko Nogabe and Mr Jonny Masilela and from the staff members we have Ms Puleng Lesala; Ms Charmaine Monareng; Mr Andrew Nkadimeng and Ms Mary-Anne Makgoka.

Additional members of our council and other staff members will be visiting the Festival during the course of the second of week.

During the previous years we may not have been as visible as you may wish however I am sure you will understand that as a relatively new council at the time, we had to first ensure that the internal systems and operations are sound, in order to deliver better service to you. In this regard I am proud to inform you that the NAC received a clean audit for 2006/2007 financial year.

It is our intention to enhance the level of our service to our constituencies in order to improve the conditions within the arts sector however this will not only be in a form of funding but also through programmes and partnerships that are crucial in ensuring growth and sustainability within the sector.

Some of you may be aware of the fact that the NAC will be hosting the World Summit on Arts & Culture during the month September in 2009, at the Newtown Cultural Precinct in Johannesburg.

This Summit will be hosted in conjunction with the International Federation of Arts and Council Agencies with the support of National Department of Arts and Culture, Gauteng Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, Johannesburg Metropolitan Council and Business and Arts South Africa.

The Council will be utilizing the opportunities presented by the conference as a platform towards establishing a cultural programme for the hosting of the 2010 Africa Soccer World Cup. But also will be an opportunity for the arts sector within the African continent to establish a network of African Arts and Culture Agencies.

In preparation for the Summit, the NAC will also be hosting an African Summit before the end of 2008 in order to prepare for the World Summit in 2009. The Africa Summit will among other things strive to establish a common position among the African States to be presented during the World Summit. Our intention with this is to have a World Summit which is influenced and informed by an African content.

We believe that the recent dispute of xenophobic violence in our country is at the heart of the cultural differences which shape the perceptions of individual's members of our society. These xenophobic incidences have been condemned in all possible ways by various sectors of our society. I wish to also encourage everyone present here tonight to take a stand against such ill disciplined behaviors of those who wish to undermine the values of our Nation.

We therefore need to begin the process of healing the wounds of those who were affected by the xenophobic violence as it is my firm believes that arts and culture can play a significant role in fostering nation building and social cohesion of our nation.

There is a need to encourage more cultural exchange programmes between our country and other African countries as a means of social interaction with our fellow African neighbors; this will go a long way in educating our society to tolerate and accept each other's cultural differences.

As one of the leading cultural festivals within the African continent, Grahamstown National Arts Festival is well positioned to bring about social transformation and promote nation building by presenting programmes that reflects a truly African identity.

The NAC will also be engaging the management of other festivals on issues that relates to representation, transformation and empowerment of the disadvantaged communities in the running of their activities without necessarily dictating the content of their programmes.

The NAC will therefore establish a circuit of festivals with the view to sustain the life span of productions that are presented here at this festival and to also improve the state of other festivals. Productions which demonstrate the level of excellence and potential to enter the mainstream will be provided with the opportunity to be mentored and showcased at other festivals and theatre venues around the country. We believe that in this way we will not only be creating jobs within the sector but we will also be developing the audiences in various communities.

It is our mandate to ensure that the artistic wealth of our nation is not only enjoyed by a particular section of our communities but by the broader South African population. In this regard we will be entering with other institutions such as the playhouses to commission a research into the dynamics of audiences within our sector.

I am pleased to learn that the management of the festival has been capacitated with the appointment of Mr Tonny Luncaster as a CEO and Mr Ishmael Mahomed as the Director of the festival. The NAC wish to congratulate them in their appointments and further look forward to healthy working relations with the festival.

I will not elaborate more on many other programmes that we are embarking on as a Council but invite you to browse our website within a month from now to experience the new approach of our institution and our day to day activities.

I would like to conclude by first thanking the organisers of the festival and everyone working at the background to ensure the success of the productions and the festival as a whole.

I wish to also take this opportunity to thank the other sponsors, particularly the private sector for sharing a common vision with the arts sector. We applaud and salute your commitment and your wise investment decision within this sector.

I thank you.