

## Keynote Address by Mr L.P.H.M. Mtshali, Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology

*Dr Dreyer, Secretary General of FIAV; Mr Stylianides, Chairman of SAVA; my colleague Mrs Olckers, MEC for Education and Culture in the Western Cape; Alderman the Reverend Bartoň, Mayor of the Cape Town Metropolitan Council; Mr Jacobs, Acting Mayor of Cape Town; delegates from around the world, honoured guests and friends: Little needs to be said about the visual and artistic appeal of flags, for words could scarcely improve on the impact made by an eye-catching flag floating in the breeze.*

*The mobility of a flag allows it to attract, hold and focus attention on a particular message, either national or sectional, whether this be in a meeting hall, in the street, at a sports event, political or cultural gathering, on a battlefield, at sea, and in more recent times, even in space.*

*Individuals and groups at every level of literacy and political sophistication are able to associate themselves with flags. In the past three years we in South Africa have become only too aware of the role which a flag can play in nation-building and as a symbol of unity.*

*Painting flags is an art; using them is an important facet of any group or nation's culture; designing them and drawing up their specifications is a science; while their manufacture, the recording and disseminating of information relative to flags falls squarely into the field of technology.*

*As Minister of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology I am delighted that this Congress is being held in Cape Town, and am honoured to have been invited to deliver the keynote address. It is, I am sure, a tribute to the dedication of the Southern African Vexillological Association (SAVA) and the sterling work which it is doing, that the International Federation has accorded it the honour of hosting the first such Congress to be held in Africa, and only the second to be held in the southern hemisphere.*

*This year marks the 7th anniversary of the establishment of SAVA and the 70th anniversary of the passing of South Africa's first legislation adopting a distinctive national flag, namely the Union Nationality and Flags Act of 1927. Our present national flag was taken into use on 27 April 1997.*

*SAVA itself was established towards the end of 1990, with the State Herald as one of the founder members, and in 1993 when South Africa was involved in its negotiations to establish a fully democratic constitutional dispensation, it is significant that the full executive of SAVA was involved, either in membership of the National Symbols Commission, or as technical assessors and advisors to the Commission's sub-committee dealing with the National Flag.*

*To the best of my knowledge there has been no other instance in which a flag association has been so intimately involved in the creation of a National Flag.*

*I am mentioning these factors because I believe that they demonstrate how we in Southern Africa have shown that it is possible to marry the political demands*

of the democratic process with the technical expertise of vexillologists, thereby arriving at a widely accepted National Flag. Our National Flag may well contain more colours than would normally be expected, but it is distinctive and the majority of the population has taken to it. We are a colourful, multi-cultured society and, for us, it works!

It is clear to me that in the process leading to the adoption of our National Flag, our vexillologists have set an example which vexillologists in other countries might well emulate in years to come. If the opportunity presents itself, do not hesitate to make available your expertise. It could well make all the difference!

Because of the active involvement of vexillologists, I believe that the process leading to the adoption of South Africa's new National Flag three years ago, and the subsequent public reaction to it, is one of the most comprehensively documented exercises in the history of vexillology.

The funds which my Department, and its predecessor Department, have made available over the past eighteen years to enable the professional staff of the Bureau of Heraldry to attend international congresses of this nature has proved to be a sound investment, bringing to this country sorely-needed expertise which has been put to excellent use. Now, after all these years, the International Congress of Vexillology has to our delight come to us.

As a token of appreciation for what the international flag fraternity, both individually and collectively, has done for South Africa over the years, and the esteem in which we hold the leading role played by SAVA in flag matters in South Africa, my Department is gratified to have been able to make what it believes to be another sound investment in providing a measure of financial support for this Congress.

This sponsorship has been aimed specifically at assisting the organisers to meet their commitment in terms of the FIAV Charter, to provide simultaneous translations of all papers into the main Congress languages, namely English, French and German. We are a multi-lingual nation with no less than eleven official languages, so my Department is very conscious of our obligations in this regard. It is a matter of regret that practical considerations prevent an even wider choice of languages for delegates.

As can be expected, a number of papers will deal with the flag history of Southern Africa from the days of the voyages of discovery some five hundred years ago, until the present.

They will touch on an overview of sovereign flags which have flown over South Africa - a theme dealt with more fully in an exhibition which you will be visiting in the Maritime Museum - flag designing, military flags, flags in a political context, legal considerations, the use of the National Flag in a commercial context and in a slight deviation from normal practice, a bitter-sweet view of our National Flag through the eye of the cartoonist.

Ranging further afield, the papers to be delivered will touch on flag issues ranging from Antarctica to the Amerindians of North America and from Guatemala to the Ottoman Empire.

*The latest technological developments will receive attention in the seminar on computers in vexillology, while anticipated future developments will also be receiving attention and will, no doubt, give you further food for thought.*

*I know that I am preaching to the converted, but I urge you to make the most of the opportunities presented by this Congress. There is nothing as stimulating as the interchange of ideas between people who share a common interest and purpose. Make full use of the Congress to recharge your vexillological batteries and inspire one another to greater heights.*

*You are, in many respects, the world leaders in this field and thus have a responsibility and obligation to share your knowledge and expertise for the betterment of society. Be generous with your talents and lay a sound framework in vexillology for the next millennium..*

*You have my sincere best wishes and those of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology as you commence this important Congress.. Make the most of it. To our overseas visitors, I trust that you will enjoy your visit to South Africa, and I wish you God-Speed and a safe trip home after the Congress.*