

**Speech by Gauteng MEC for Human Settlements, Urban Planning, Cooperative Governance and Traditional Affairs, Lebogang Maile on the occasion of the Gauteng Initiation Summit, Velmore, 13 February 2020.**

Programme Director

Fellow Members of Provincial Exco

Honourable MMCs from our municipalities

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Ladies and Gentlemen

In trying to define culture, African literary giant Ngugi wa Thiong'o made the following observation, "culture in its broadest sense, is a way of life fashioned by people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment." Cultural norms, practices and beliefs are a critical part of our collective psyche as a people and one of the crucial aspects of the constitutional democracy that we are building, is that it recognises and affirms the importance of culture as a building block of a healthy society, not dismissing traditional cultural norms as backwards and uncivilised as was done in the previous dispensation.

Programme Director

The constitutional era that we are currently in, with its emphasis on uniting South Africans, is founded on embracing a plurality of cultures as part of the nation-building project. It places a high emphasis on the preservation and promotion of traditional cultural norms and practices within a pluralistic, modern society as part of affirming the identity and history of the black majority which for many years was treated with contempt and disdain.

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This respect for cultural norms and practices is however, not based on a desire to return to indigenous practices and cultural forms as they existed in pre-colonial society, but rather about asserting the importance of our outlook, history and traditions within a modern, pluralistic world.

It's not about promoting cultural assimilation and uniformity, but rather about embracing plurality and diversity within the quest for a united, democratic, modern state. In this regard, culture is viewed, not as a static, eternally fixed phenomenon, but rather as something that is evolutionary and grows and changes with the times, without losing its essence and meaning for a people.

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It is within this context, that we come together over the next two days, to zoom into the important cultural practice of initiation and look to find ways in which we can better practice it in a manner that protects and preserves the lives of the young people that are required to go through it, further legitimising it within our modern, democratic, constitutional dispensation.

#### Programme Director

The Customary Initiation Bill was tabled in national parliament in 2018 and eventually passed, as a way of legislating this practice, constitutionally recognising its legitimacy and importance. So, we must ensure that we formalise and give proper oversight to initiation practices and initiation schools by ensuring that all initiation schools and traditional surgeons are registered, doing this in tandem with the Department of Health. We must create and maintain a database of traditional surgeons and nurses.

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It is interesting and unsurprising that in Gauteng over the past initiation season, we experienced no fatalities in all our legally registered schools, with the only fatalities being recorded being those in illegal schools. We must ensure that law enforcement agencies come down hard on all those who operate illegal schools within our province, arresting and pressing criminal charges against all those who seek to operate outside the ambit of the law.

#### Programme Director

The commodification of this customary practice for personal enrichment is one of its biggest threats. We have seen a growing number of people parading as legitimate or genuine initiation experts, opening bogus initiation schools in order to make money, thus putting the lives of young initiates at risk.

A broad front, involving legitimate, registered practitioners; traditional leaders; civil society and relevant state institutions is needed to clamp down on bogus initiation schools.

We must also put to an end the illegal practice of brining children underage to these initiation schools, as well as the forced abduction of young people into these initiation schools and the substance and drug abuse that is prevalent within these schools.

Programme Director

It is also incumbent upon our municipalities to play a role in ensuring the formalisation and smooth running of initiation schools within the five development corridors that make up Gauteng City Region, with the Customary Initiation Bill making provision for municipalities to strengthen by-laws and regulatory processes in this regard, as well as enjoining municipalities to ensure the provision of the requisite infrastructure, such as land, clean water and sites for healthy and safe initiations.

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We have to complete work on our provincial draft initiation policy and finalise it and we have to ensure that there is an effective provincial task team on initiation schools consisting of relevant provincial departments such as Social Development, Health, Community Safety and of course CoGTA, all our municipalities and relevant stakeholders in order to ensure that we can move towards no casualties within our province whenever the season for initiation schools is upon us.

Thank You!!!