

16 June 2004

Opening Address by Naledi Pandor, MP, Minister of Education, at the Design Designers Awards, The Performer, Menlo Park, Pretoria

"It's a design thing"

I am very pleased to be with you here on this day, 16 June. It is a day on which we commemorate the Soweto uprising and celebrate the role young people played in bringing the evil system of apartheid to an end.

The uprising started in Soweto and soon spread to all parts of the country. Pupils led the uprising, often against the wishes of their parents. But the system they opposed overwhelmed them. It began with a rejection of Afrikaans and ended by rocking the old regime to its foundations.

Hundreds died as the authorities struggled to reassert control. This uprising marked the emergence of a new generation of leaders, after more than a decade of political quiescence. In its aftermath thousands fled the country into exile, mass-based organizations grew, and the old regime became increasingly isolated. The rest, as they say, is history.

The disruptions of the uprising meant many pupils never finished their schooling. Some fled the country to study. Others joined the armed struggle. Most simply had to find a job. Some joined unions and transformed them. In turn they changed the landscape of politics forever.

Let us stand for a moment. Let us remember the Soweto martyrs. Let us remember with pride and gratitude, the young South Africans from all our communities, over many generations that resisted oppression. While their bodies were in chains, their minds and spirits were free, so that you, the future generations could prosper.

In commemorating this day, we should always remember that the young heroes of the struggle had a noble mission. They were inspired by a thirst for knowledge: a thirst that knows no colour; a thirst acquired through persuasion and hard work; a thirst that taps talents and releases creative energies; and a thirst that puts South African youth on par with the best in the world.

A cornerstone of our responsibility in government is to create the conditions that will support both creativity and innovation throughout our society.

I can certainly agree with the Design Institute when they say that these awards show that South Africa is a

country with great creative potential.

The imagination displayed in the student work I have seen this morning is exciting. I have no doubt that the winners will reshape the design landscape of our country as winners have done in the past.

I am particularly impressed that the award is designed to encourage students to develop a business concept that will contribute to solving a “social, environmental, industrial or cultural problem currently experienced in South Africa or further afield in Africa”. This is a commitment to finding ways to sustain economic development.

Design and development. Sustainable development and design. Here are some essential concepts to think about.

“We do not inherit the earth, we borrow it from our children.”

That was the slogan or sentence that captured the essence of the World Summit in Johannesburg two years ago. Sustainable development means joining together:

- Economic growth to provide decent jobs for workers and greater prosperity for the world as a whole,
- Social upliftment to eradicate poverty, especially for women, the elderly, the youth and the disabled,
- Environmental protection, so that as we grow and develop we should not destroy the environment, which also belongs to our children and our children’s children.

At the Johannesburg summit we agreed that the main problems we face today are:

- Levels of poverty and inequality continue to be unacceptable, particularly in Africa. Also, the gap between rich and poor has grown wider. In 1993 around 25% of the world's people got 75% of the world's income. In that same year, the US population (which is 250 million) had an income greater than the poorest 43% of the world's people (which are 2 billion).
- The rich countries have not kept their commitments. The rich developed countries have not gone far enough in fulfilling promises they made in Rio - either to protect their own environments or to help the developing world defeat poverty. Poor countries are still unfairly denied access to the markets of rich countries.
- Environmental injustice continues. It is the poor who suffer most from environmental problems since it is they who have inadequate access to natural resources, and live in degraded environments. More

than 1 billion people are without safe drinking water. Twice that number lack adequate sanitation. And more than 3 million people die every year from diseases caused by unsafe water. The biggest cause of death in children under the age of five is now acute lung diseases, caused largely by our world's pollution problems.

The aim of NEPAD is to redevelop the continent, its resources and the innovativeness of the African people. African designers have a critical role to play in terms of taking a proactive lead in the development of entrepreneurship and innovation on the continent.

I have seen a range of fascinating design this morning: graphic, industrial, clothing, ceramic, and textile or jewellery design.

My own particular interest lies in clothing design. Will you forgive me if I indulge myself and tell you a story about clothing that was sparked off by a fascinating article I read in *ThisDay* on Monday about *shweshwe* cloth.

First, a little history to put the story in context. Britain's industrialisation was secured by destroying the manufacturing capacity of India. In 1700 Britain banned the import of cotton cloth (or calico) from India, because it was superior to its own cloth manufactures. Throughout the 18th and 19th centuries, India was forced to supply raw materials to Britain's manufacturers in famous Manchester, but forbidden to produce competing finished products. Britons became rich because Indians stayed poor.

Today as those satanic mills have ground to a halt, Britain is exporting those jobs they stole and others back to India. Indian workers can out compete British workers today because Britain smashed their ability to compete in the past. Having destroyed India's own industries, the East India Company and the colonial authorities obliged its people to speak English, adopt British working practices, and surrender their labour to multinational corporations.

There is nothing new about multinational corporations forcing workers in distant parts of the world to undercut each other. What is new is the extent to which the labour forces of the poor nations are also beginning to threaten the security of British middle classes. For the first time in history, the professional classes (IT, financial, and service executives and not simply call centre operatives) of Britain and America find themselves in direct competition with the professional classes of another nation. Over the next few years, we can expect to encounter a lot less enthusiasm for free trade. Free trade is fine, as long as it affects someone else's job.

A similar process has taken place in the manufacture of a cloth we call *shweshwe* – and this is where I return to the fascinating article I read. The missionaries introduced this cloth to mission stations in our country in the 1850s. It had a distinctive smell that came from a dye oil known as “turkey oil”. It was popular for over a hundred years or more, but it was not fashionable. It was the sort of cloth that our grannies wore. Young people like you were not likely to wear *shweshwe*.

Then along came designers like Amanda Laird Cherrie and Sun Goddess and Nkhensani Manganyi's Stoned Cherrie and they cut the cloth in more fashionable ways. In the 2000 summer collections, apparently,

the *shweshwe* A-line was hot on the catwalk.

Part of the reason for this was that the manufacturing of the cloth had been changed. For decades it had been produced on archaic copperplate machinery, not here, but in Manchester. In the mid-1990s these Manchester factories were closed down and British jobs exported to India and elsewhere, but the machinery used to make *shweshwe* cloth was sold to Queenstown-based Da Gama textiles, which today is the sole maker of the cloth.

This space for fantastic indigenous design had been partly created by Marian Fassler and her version of the traditional Xhosa skirt. It was popular. It was so popular that demand was overwhelming. But a skirt needs a top and along came the Xhosa corset and the *shweshwe* A-line. The rest is history.

This was not fashion for the rich. Young designers transformed this fabric and this outfit into clothing affordable by young women of all races. So successful has this cloth and design become that top designers in Europe are busy copying from us.

This is a wonderful success story, one that I hope all of you who have exhibited here will emulate.