

TO: EDITORS/REPORTERS

19 FEBRUARY 2026

**CELEBRATING INTERNATIONAL MOTHER TONGUE IN THE CONTEXT OF
CULTURAL, RELIGIOUS, AND LINGUISTIC COMMUNITIES**

The Commission for the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities celebrates International Mother Tongue, joining communities locally and globally in recognising the importance of linguistic diversity.

Significantly, the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Section 185 of Chapter 9, calls for the promotion, respect for, and further the protection of the rights of cultural, religious, and linguistic communities, but also the promotion of the right of communities to develop their historically diminished heritage, among other rights.

Furthermore, the RSA Constitution, 1996, Section 6(2), calls upon the state to take practical and positive measures to elevate the status and advance the use of these languages. Equally important, Section 29(2) states that students have the right to receive education in the languages of their choice in public educational institutions, where that is reasonably practicable. In that regard, it calls for universities to formulate a language policy that strives to develop languages other than English and Afrikaans for academic purposes. Notably, some universities have heeded these calls to varying degrees, with some demonstrating greater commitment than others.

Engagements with Universities

In this context, the CRL Rights Commission commemorates this important occasion by hosting dialogues with young people at different universities, as well as another event in Soweto in partnership with the Andrew Mlangeni Foundation. The discussions at these dialogues focus on preserving their indigenous languages, which are in rapid decline among the youth due to modernisation. Thus, the emphasis on youth engagement aims to help

them recognize the value of using African Languages, which were once stigmatized and long dormant.

To that end, these dialogues seek to unpack challenges related to the use and preservation of the mother tongue and to explore ways to cultivate, preserve, and promote the rights to use and preserve indigenous languages. They further explore how young people can develop innovative ways to preserve and promote the use of their mother tongue on social networks, enabling users to connect, communicate, share information, and build relationships. They also aim to underscore the importance of embracing cultural and linguistic diversity in society. Notably, language is not only a central contributor to dialogue, reconciliation, tolerance, and peace worldwide, particularly as it carries human values, beliefs, and identity, which are embedded in language, but it is also the transmitter of our human experience, traditions, and knowledge.

The theme, objectives, and venues of these dialogues:

Theme: “Using technology for multilingual learning: Challenges and opportunities.”

The theme highlights that languages and multilingualism can promote inclusion, aligning with the UN’s Sustainable Development Goals, which focus on leaving no one behind. UNESCO emphasizes that education, grounded in the first language or mother tongue, must begin in early childhood care and education as the foundation of learning.

The objectives of the dialogues are:

- Influence and shape the relationship between culture, religions, and languages among youths.
- Come up with a strategy that will embed youths with the knowledge of diversity in cultural and linguistic environments
- Equip youths with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary for self-fulfilment and meaningful participation in society as citizens of a free country.
- Create an awareness that all youths can benefit from cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity, not only those with limited English proficiency.
- Educate South African society from a young age about the cultural, religious, and linguistic rights of communities

These dialogues are taking place as follows:

- ✓ University of Fort Hare (**16 February 2026**),
- ✓ Nelson Mandela (**18 February 2026**),
- ✓ Walter Sisulu (**17 February 2026**), and
- ✓ Rhodes (**19 February 2026**).

Engagement with the Youth in Soweto

The dialogue in Soweto on 20 February 2026, at the Hector Pieterse Memorial, Uncle Tom's Hall, Soweto, will provide a platform to reaffirm linguistic rights as human rights, promote social cohesion through language recognition, and highlight the historical struggles linked to language.

Soweto is historically significant as the epicentre of the 1976 student uprising, sparked by the imposition of Afrikaans as a medium of instruction. The uprising, now commemorated as Youth Day, symbolises resistance against linguistic oppression.

Notably, the year 2026 marks 50 years since the historic uprising — a defining moment in South Africa's democratic journey. The event will contextualise language as both a tool of oppression and a tool of liberation.

Specifically, it will:

- Raise awareness about linguistic justice and equity.
- Reflect on historical language struggles.
- Promote multilingual education.
- Encourage social inclusion and nation-building.

Consequently, the Commission anticipates that these dialogues will further facilitate the implementation of Section 31 of the Constitution, which permits individuals from cultural, religious, or linguistic communities to enjoy their culture, practice their religion, and use their language. Additionally, these individuals possess the right to form, join, and maintain associations with other civil society organizations.

For any enquiries, you can contact the Commission:

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