THE SOUTH AFRICAN BRAILLE AUTHORITY (SABA)

115-801NPO

COUNTRY REPORT FOR

THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ENGLISH BRAILLE (ICEB)

THE 2020 GENERAL ASSEMBLY

# INTRODUCTION

This report will serve before the 2020 ICEB General Assembly to be held virtually, organised by UKAFF. SABA wishes to appreciate UKAFF for facilitating the 2020 General Assembly, besides the difficulties imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic.

SABA is currently an active role player at ICEB and its committees. We are grateful that we represent Africa, especially the Sub-Saharan Africa, in a way that benefits and influences, other countries who are still contemplating to join ICEB. We extend our expertise to the neighbouring countries who, at their own space and pursuance, ask SABA to guide them in braille-related matters. SABA remains committed to the development and implementation of braille in Sub-Saharan African countries.

# COMPOSITION OF EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In 2018, SABA General Assembly hosted by the University of South Africa (Unisa), in Durban, elected the following individuals to serve at the Executive Committee:

* Mr Ntshavheni Netshituni (President);
* Mr Christo de Klerk (vice president, redesignated);
* Mr Deenadayalan Moodley (Treasurer);
* Mr Cyprian Mogane (member);
* Ms Teresia Lesufi (member);
* Mrs Shani Little (member and minute compilation, co-opted); and
* Mr Ofentse Manyane (member).

NB: Mrs Reinette Popplestone was elected vice president in 2018. She passed on in May 2019 and Mr de Klerk was appointed vice president and Mrs Shani Little was co-opted member of the Exco in July 2019.

Pioneer Printers is serving on the board as secretariat. This is a non-voting position and is appointed by the executive.

# IN MEMORIAM

SABA wishes to acknowledge two of its stalwarts in the development of braille. Mrs Reinette Popplestone who passed on in May 2019 and Ms Antonette Botha who passed on in August 2019. All of these played an immense role in the development of braille, not only in South Africa, but in the global arena. We also record the passing on of Mr. Charles McKallahan of the SA Library for the Blind as well as Ms Makhalela. May their souls rest in perfect peace.

# GENERAL ASSEMBLIES

During the 2016-2020 period, the Authority held three General Assemblies. Due to the COVID-19, the 2020 edition of the General Assembly could not be held. A new date, probably in 2021, is still being planned. Two elective General Assemblies were held in 2016 and 2018. The 2020 elections are to be held when the General Assembly is held on the date to be decided. Effectively, the current executive shall remain operational until the date of such elections.

# STAKEHOLDER RELATION

* DAC: In spite of the very difficult circumstances, SABA still holds in high esteem the Department of Arts and Culture for their unwavering support of braille in the country. We trust this support shall continue as is. SABA engaged DAC in 2018 to discuss the establishment of the Braille Museum. This idea had since been brought to life, and is discussed fully below.
* Blind SA: SABA has entered into a partnership with one of its members, Blind SA, to conduct training wherever it is required. This is the sole major fund-generation programme which had sustained SABA to this end. SABA also collaborated with Blind SA to facilitate the 2018, 2019 and the 2020 World Read Aloud Day events. The 2019 and the 2020 editions were held on the Mother Tongue Day on 21 February. This seems to be a growing event.
* DBE: The Authority continues to play its advisory role at the Department of Basic Education’s (DBE) learner-teacher support materials (LTSM) advisory task team on braille matters. This is a team that discusses the provision of Learner-Teacher Support Materials to schools. However, we have noted with disappointment the inactiveness displayed by this structure. Its last physical meeting was in 2018. That means nothing tangible had been done to serve learners who are in dire need for such intervention. Compounded with the unceremonious presence of CoronaVirus on our schools, the sluggish responsiveness and belated implementation of guidelines by this department had seen some lives lost, intermittent closures of schools and more frustrations caused.
* Department of Social Development: This relationship had strained because the Department seems not willing to engage with the Authority. We will endeavor to put pressure on the Department so that they play a meaningful role in braille.
* SANCB: The Authority had partnered with the South African National Council for the Blind and Blind SA to roll out the 2017 edition of the Braille Cup; collaborated with the SANCB in the 2018 and 2019 editions of the braille cup. Experts raised concerns in 2019 that braille seems to be losing its grip, especially at schools that were previously disadvantaged. Participation by schools had declined as well, and this is a concern to the Authority.

# ACTIVITIES

During the past term, the authority worked on the following activities:

* Conclusion on the implementation of UBC symbols on Afrikaans diacritics. The actual implementation of these symbols is to be adopted by the general assembly in May. The team was still hard at work testing the possible flaws in respect of the applicability of these symbols.
* The establishment of braille museum. Mr. de Klerk and Mr. Moodley accompanied the president to the Department of Arts and Culture, to meet with Mr. Kekana and Mrs Phasha to discuss the matter on the establishment of the Braille Museum. From this engagement, it was agreed that the Authority will embark on discussions with the South African National Council for the Blind (SANCB), or any organisation who might be in a position to support, to find out if there are possibilities of coordinating this fascinating initiative together. A meeting was planned for 16 April with the National Executive Director (NED) of Council. Talks with SANCB went on well with the NED passionately looking forward to this exciting initiative. A MoU was drafted and was due to be signed in 2020. However, this relationship fell apart due to SANCB not being fully committing to this project. SABA had since contacted and agreed with Blind SA that a venue will be provided when the new building is purchased. Blind SA will also provide an annual grant to the Museum for its sustenance. SABA also thanks the offer made by Vision Australia to donate some items which will be displayed at the Museum. We appreciate this gesture and wish to get this historic initiative taking its shape soon.
* African languages: The committee on African languages is continuing to put together words which should be used for the current development of Nguni languages via the office of the Consultancy of the South African Library for the Blind (SALB). Contributing to the development of braille, the work on the word list of the Nguni languages is specifically for the creation of a translation table for the LibLouis braille translator. SABA appreciates a team led by Mr de Klerk, which is working on this project.
* Tatrapoint: The Authority supports any initiative by any of its members to land devices into the hands of our blind constituency at a cheaper price. Blind SA, collaborating with Edit Micro, is distributing a cheaper version of a brailler (the Tatrapoint), which is selling for around R8,000.
* The Braille Me: Innovation, an Indian company had partnered with Blind SA in the distribution of a cheaper version of a 20-cell braille display known as the Braille Me. Mr Christo de Klerk and Mr Deena Moodley were appointed as internal experts to advice on the technical errors on the machine before they are sold to buyers.
* The Afrikaans Rules Team decided on the use of Afrikaans Diacritic, and resolved that in Afrikaans, the UEB signs be used to indicate diacritic marks on letters instead of the current abbreviated usage. This decision was ratified at the 2018 General Assembly and was applied from January 2019.
* Certification of braille producers: At the behest of government who wanted to work with reputable braille producers, SABA also introduced a system by which its members who produce braille should be certified. This will ensure that government departments who want to employ their services refer to the list of certified braille producers from which list they can select. Certificate awarded to the producer is valid for three years, after which period organisations must reapply and a process is put in place in order to complete the certification application. Currently, Blind SA and Pioneer Printers are endorsed braille producers.
* SURVEYS: SABA had also participated on surveys conducted by ICEB. This relates to the survey on the sign to be used for apostrophe, music enquiries, application of UEB rules etc.
* Constitutional changes: The Constitution of SABA was amended at the 2018 and 2019 General Assemblies and remains in operation until further amended in terms of the processes set forth in the constitution.
* A task team led by Ms Anisha Ramlaul drafted braille unit standards since the ones in use are outdated. This task was accomplished with great success by the deadline which was August 2019. These standards must be given to the Standard Authority for inclusion in the system.
* DBT template: Emanating from the 2017 General Assembly, SABA developed a DBT template with a view to standardise translations for braille production in the South African context. It was felt, inter alia, that the headings should be built in a certain manner, which will be more understandable for users and readers.
* Two successful braille examinations were conducted in 2018, one in SeSotho (which is one of the African languages), and one in English. Even though some few concerns were raised in respect of SeSotho examination, we are excited that some schools were interested in participating, and we intend improving in the next edition of the examinations.
* Braille training: not mentioning dates, the Authority together with Blind SA, offered the following training programmes: Examination Council of Lesotho; Mpumalanga Dept of Education; Christiana School for the Blind; Retlameleng School; Free State Dept of Education; Kwa-Zulu Natal Dept of Education; and Eastern Cape Dept of Education. These training programmes were presented on various grades, viz: grade 1 braille; grade 2 braille; and technical braille. In order to empower the Authority for future provisioning of braille training, two members were trained in the ETDPSETA training.

# ICEB MEETINGS

The president of SABA is a member at large of ICEB executive. After some few months in which technology made it difficult for the president to attend quarterly skype meetings of ICEB Exco since he joined ICEB in 2016, he managed to constantly attend all meetings to date. He reported on braille matters of interest taking place in the country. The president also attended the 2018 Mid-term ICEB Exco meeting which was held in Dublin, Ireland. We note with gratitude the support and funding by the DSAC, of the SABA president’s attendance of the 2016 General Assembly in Baltimore, and for Unisa to have funded the president’s attendance of the 2018 Executive Mid-Term meeting held in Dublin, Ireland.

In 2019, the president attended the African Forum of the Blind. This conference took place in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. He presented a paper on the preservation of Braille in Africa. Once again, we appreciate Unisa for supporting the president for the attendance of this conference.

# CONCLUSION

SABA presents this report for the 2020 General Assembly of ICEB in support of all programmes which the Council had anticipated to accomplish. It is our responsibility as a country affiliated to ICEB to localise programmes of braille and to ensure that correct braille codes and decisions are implemented. SABA commits to the work of ICEB and shall provide any such required support. We believe from this general assembly, more decisions that will help the growth of braille will be taken. It is also important that we thank all the support we receive from our stakeholders in ensuring that the work of braille continues. Worth mentioning, the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, the University of South Africa and others. We trust this relationship will continue for the benefit of South Africa’s community of braille users.

Thank you

Ntshavheni Netshituni (President)