



Remarks by H.E. Ambassador M.J. Mahlangu,  
South African Ambassador to the United States of America  
to the BOOKS for AFRICA event  
June 18, 2016  
Atlanta, Georgia

Ms Luanne Nyberg, President of Books for Africa,  
Mr Patrick Plonski, Executive Director of Books for Africa,  
Mr Scott Griffen, Greif Incorporated,  
Mr Peter Brookhart, Follett School Solutions,  
Board Members of the various organizations,  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my most sincere pleasure to be able join you today for this auspicious event – the formal opening of the “Books for Africa” new warehouse in Atlanta, Georgia

When I met with Patrick and Henry Bromelkamp from “Africa Classroom Connection” earlier this year in April, it was very heartening to note the extent and

impact of the work that “Books for Africa” is undertaking in Africa: “Books For Africa” remains the largest shipper of donated text and library books to the African continent and, if I recall correctly, you have shipped over 35 million books to 49 different countries since 1988 – with over 2.4 million books, 665 computers and 200 e-readers containing 1.6 million digital books shipped over the past 12 months!

Added to this, and please correct me if I may have the figures incorrect, Books for Africa raised more than \$2.3 million dollars last year - to ship the books to the students of Africa. An exceptional and very laudable achievement – and even more so for a non-profit organization.

For those of you that may not be aware of this, Books for Africa has also extended its operations to South Africa - In 2013, BFA shipped a 40-foot container to South Africa to benefit children from poor communities in rural KwaZulu-Natal.

And our relationship, and the relationship between Books for Africa and the African continent, goes back even further than this – BFA also have extensive operations in *inter alia* Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia and other African countries.

The question that invariably arises is: “What is the impact of these great initiatives?”

To attempt to give a perspective on the impact, please allow me to reflect on my country - South Africa.

South Africa has a particularly challenging history - that of apartheid which had defined the destiny of South Africans predominately on racial classification. In 1994, South Africans came together to create a new nation based on a constitutional democracy. Now, after 21 years of democracy, it is clear: South Africa of today is better than the South Africa of pre-1994.

We have also been hard at work to build and strengthen our society in order to leverage this political dividend. I am proud to share with this audience that, on this front as well, we have a good story to tell, which is under-scored by the notable transformation over the past 21 years. There has been a remarkable growth in the middle-class, substantial economic growth and, most importantly, significant gains in terms of socio-economic development – the most important being access to housing, affordable health care, social welfare and, one of the most important determinant of the future for our young people – education. *Mandela "Education is the most powerful tool you can use to change the world"*

No Government, however, has all the necessary resources to effectively address the educational challenge – and this is where the impact of Books for Africa is so significant : You provide the opportunity to disadvantaged communities in South Africa and across the Africa Continent to have access to reading and learning material – TO BE ABLE TO READ – and in doing so, to learn, to open new horizons.

This not only guarantees that children in Africa can have aspirations and reach their full human potential, but BFA's work is critical in ensuring that the 'African youth bulge' can become a "youth dividend".

Ladies and gentlemen,

This new warehouse is not only a physical example of the great and ever increasing importance of the work that BFA is doing, but also is a testimony of the commitment by ordinary Americans to help the less fortunate and to improve the lives of my fellow South Africans and Africans.

Books for Africa plays a critical and pivotal role in providing opportunities for a new future for the disadvantaged in our communities across the African continent – and for this, please accept my heartfelt thanks and most sincere gratitude.

Thank you. *Mandela " Education is key to eliminate gender inequality, to reduce poverty, to create a sustainable planet, to preventing needless deaths and illness and to foster peace.*

*Thank you*