



□ Adelle George from Laerskool Nantes reads Piet Grobbelaar's *Mia se Ma*, which she received at the Tuks BoekJol. ANC treasurer Mathew Phosa has urged South Africans to respect the country's diverse languages. PICTURE: SARAH MAKOE

Let us speak to one another – Phosa

XOLANI MBANJWA

South African citizens need to respect and acknowledge each other's cultures and languages and realise that they need each other, ANC treasurer Mathew Phosa said.

Speaking at a University of Pretoria's celebration of its centenary and the BoekJol – a celebration of books, reading, music and art – Phosa urged South Africans not to exclude other cultures and languages in the post-liberation phase of the country.

He said: "We live in a wonderful country full of a variety of different shapes and colours, blessed with complementing cultures and designed in such a way that we have the privilege of many different languages. Language offers a sharp and soft instrument that brings power and acceptance, and brings new perspectives, challenges and common ground between us.

"The simple act of trying to master a new language opens up new barriers for you and gives you access to new experiences and new

opportunities." Phosa said that while 11 official languages were recognised, we "must not emphasise differences".

Referring to the shocking racist video produced by four Afrikaner students at the University of the Free State, Phosa said: "Afrikaans is the perfect example of a cultural vehicle that was hijacked for political and other purposes. Through that, it became a political target, and in the process there were unintended consequences: a beautiful language became labelled as the language of the oppressor.

"It became a language associated with a despised political system, and it became an initial victim of the struggle for the liberation of our country."

He urged South Africans to heed the lessons learnt through experiences "that should guide us as we plan for the next, more inclusive, chapter of our common future and history of the country".

"I urge you to reach across divides and hold the languages of your neighbours close to your chest;

to learn those languages, to study them, to share them and to speak them. You can only hold me close to our heart if I find a way to communicate. Language is that medium. It is the spear in our hands that we want to put to new use."

Phosa said his request to fellow citizens was to let language build and "solidify" bridges to illustrate patriotism by "getting out of our armchairs and talking to one another, however uncomfortable, difficult and funny that may be".

Tuks principal, Calie Pistorius, said the actions of the UFS students were "degrading".

He said: "The university abhors racism and sexual harassment and will seek to eradicate it. The university is not an island. If racism, sexual harassment and crime are present in the broader society and in the city around us, it would be unrealistic not to expect that they will somehow spill on to the campus.

"The university's position on these issues is clear – these social evils cannot be tolerated on this campus."