

OFFICIAL SPEECHES

SPEECH OF WELCOME BY THE HONOURABLE SENATOR CANON D.P.S. DLAMINI,
MINISTER OF EDUCATION, SWAZILAND

On behalf of the Government of Swaziland may I say to all our visitors from overseas "Siyanemukela lapha kaNgwane," which is to say "Welcome to the Kingdom of Swaziland." We hope that you will all have a very enjoyable and profitable stay here in our beautiful country. I hope that you will be allowed time from your deliberations to see something of the life and culture of our country. I understand that you will be paying a visit to our local game reserve and will also be entertained by traditional singing and dancing. As brothers and sisters in the Commonwealth of Nations, I hope you will feel at home here and take back pleasant memories of your brief stay in our country.

When the Commonwealth Secretariat invited us to host this workshop, we were honoured that our small Kingdom should be asked and were delighted to accept this responsibility. The Commonwealth Secretariat is active in many fields, of which education is one and we are very pleased to welcome the Director of the Education Division, Mr Rex Akpofure.

Perhaps at times the benefits of membership of the Commonwealth may seem intangible, but today we have the opportunity to see one of the many facets of the Commonwealth in action. Many of the Commonwealth African countries are represented. So too is the Asian region. Although we all have our own languages and culture, membership of the Commonwealth binds us together.

The theme of the workshop is In-Service Teacher Education. This is a vital part of the educational structure of any country, and one which we are all striving to improve. This workshop will give you an opportunity to discuss common problems, to share ideas, to hear of other countries' solutions and perhaps failures. I hope that the atmosphere of the workshop will encourage you all to speak freely and frankly about this particular area of education.

I would like to quote to you from a Mathematics Teachers' Magazine the recollections of an experienced teacher, looking back on her early days of teaching in England.

"I can remember myself as a new teacher quite clearly; the slight shock of going into a classroom with a number of pupils and the door being shut. At least that was one of the ways in which I viewed it. I do not think I saw the freedom as an opportunity to develop my own ideas or ways of working. I did not see the isolation as a challenge to find paths of communication to my fellow teachers. I did not see the walls as a barrier to be breached so that what one did in the classroom was meaningful in terms of the mainstream of life. For a variety of reasons, I did not enter the teaching profession with an overdose of self-confidence.

I remember I used to think that all the other teachers knew what they were doing and it was only me who had difficulties. Then one day, when attending a course I started to compare notes with another mathematics teacher in the coffee queue. I could hardly believe it. We both had so much in common, the same difficulties, anxieties and problems. It dawned on me - I wasn't the only idiot. Perhaps many of us really feel the same way. It is just that we seldom have the opportunity to meet and talk to one another on neutral ground with anxieties lowered."

Here in Swaziland we have a tradition for long distance running. You may have heard of the book entitled 'The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner'! Many teachers must feel this loneliness especially in the vast, thinly populated countries that some of you represent. Swaziland is a small country and yet some of our teachers in the more remote areas hardly ever see a visitor. It is vital to a teacher's professional progress that he or she has the chance to meet and discuss problems and learn of new developments. Gone are the days when the time spent at university or college of education was considered to be sufficient to produce a proficient teacher.

I am sure we all agree that this formal period of a teacher's life is only the beginning of his or her development as a teacher. Today we see so much around us that is pre-packed, pre-cooked, convenient, instant but nobody has yet produced the "instant teacher" and, I suspect, never will. The proliferation of materials, apparatus and technological advances means that a teacher must always be choosing, modifying and developing that which he or she considers the best for the local situation.

In common with many developing countries, Swaziland has embarked on the development of new curricula at both Primary and Secondary levels. In the decade since independence the number of pupils receiving full-time education has expanded enormously. No longer are we educating an elite few. Our hopes are to have Universal Primary Education by 1985. This puts tremendous pressure and responsibility on our Curriculum Development and In-Service manpower. But it is an essential task and one which must be done thoroughly and well. Our educational system must meet the needs of the Kingdom in terms of manpower, the attitudes of future citizens and the preservation of our culture and language. These challenges, I am sure, are common to many of the countries represented here today. For this reason I welcome the opportunity that this workshop will offer.

I understand that you will visit one of our In-Service Projects at the William Pitcher Teacher Training College, and of course here at the Swaziland International Education Centre facilities exist for people to obtain academic qualifications through correspondence courses.

My life has been devoted to the work of the Church, but recently His Majesty, King Sobhuza II requested me to head the Ministry of Education. I see the work of the Church and the schools as complementary. Both are endeavouring to develop our people into complete persons in mind, body and spirit.

Mr Chairman, I wish this workshop every success during the next two weeks and have great pleasure in declaring the workshop officially open. Thank you.