THE SOUTH AFRICAN BRAILLE AUTHORITY (SABA)

REPORT TO THE EIGHTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL ON ENGLISH BRAILLE (ICEB)

26-29 MAY 2024

1. INTRODUCTION

This Report is a Country Report of South Africa to the Eighth ICEB General Assembly. It gives account of the state of SABA from the last ICEB General Assembly (2020) to date. The content of the Report is largely drawn from activities of various Organisations that affiliate to SABA and Committees that were established by SABA to do specific work.

1. COMPOSITION OF SABA

The SABA membership is based on individuals with relevant expertise and interest in braille; braille producers; institutions with disability units who produce material in braille; etc. It is this group of divergent interest, background and expertise who form part of SABA.

1. COMPOSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

In 2021, SABA virtually held its General Assembly. This was the first time the General Assembly was held virtually, and it posed several challenges as regards connectivity and unreliable and inconsistent attendance of members. The three days have given a different number of attendance and numbers during the sessions kept on fluctuating.

From this meeting, the following individuals were elected to lead the Authority:

* President – Mr. Lewis Nzimande;
* Deputy President – Mrs Shani Little;
* Treasurer – Mr. Neels Matthyser;
* Additional member – Mr. Ntshavheni Netshituni;
* Additional member – Mr. Hanif Kruger;
* Additional member – Mrs Pasha Alden; and
* Additional member – Mr. Gerhardt Erasmus.

This is the team of people that led the Authority from 2021 to 2024, when another round of elections was done in March. The following individuals were elected to the Executive Committee in March 2024:

* President – Mr. Ntshavheni Netshituni;
* Deputy President – Prof Obert Maguvhe;
* Treasurer – Mr. Deena Moodley;
* Additional member – Ms. Nomsa Mukwevho;
* Additional member – Mr. Hanif Kruger;
* Additional member – Christo de Klerk; and
* Additional member – Mr. Eric Gama.

1. ACTIVITIES DURING THE TERM
   1. SUPPORT TO MEMBERS

The Exco provided, as per the constitution of SABA, support to Member Organisations of SABA, which includes among others, the issuing of certificates of indorsement of braille production houses, for the guarantee on standards and quality assurance in compliance with UBC.

* 1. PROJECTS AND ACTIVITIES

SABA continued to partner with Member Organisations in various projects that are promoting braille use, that is, writing and reading by blind people, especially children and youth. These Organisations include Blind SA on the Read Aloud Day Project which has grown from a one-day event to a full week event held towards the end of February. A number of special schools were visited during each year of the implementation of the World Read Aloud Day activities which were mainly led by Blind SA.

The South African National Council for the Blind (SANCB) Braille Cup Competition, which has also grown from a one-day event to two days which is held during September or October. Over 70% of special schools participated in the braille cup Project in the promotion of braille use through writing and reading amongst learners to date.

In 2021 after the general assembly, the new exco received on the handover from their predecessor, the matter of the establishment of the Braille Museum in South Africa, which was assigned to Blind SA and SANCB, and was undertaken immediately. The exco engaged all parties that were assigned to undertake the Braille Museum project for the pursuance of the establishment of the Braille Museum in South Africa. After all negotiations and engagements were done, it was agreed that the original name of the Project, which was to be Josie Wood initially, had to be changed and a new name to be solicited, that will befit the status and stature of the Braille Museum Project. It was further agreed that a sole host be Blind SA and the museum was launched in November 2022, the consensus name is Antonette Botha Braille Museum (ABBM), as we know it today. A board was established with representatives from SABA exco and Blind SA. Blind SA contributes a sum of money to keep the Museum afloat. We value this Project for the rich heritage on braille material, equipment and items that have come to become a life history of blind and partially sighted persons for over the past 200 years.

1. ORGANISATION/COMMITTEE WORK
   1. BLIND SA

Blind SA prides itself for producing braille (literary, technical and tactile graphics), large print and audio (Daisy and MP3), for clients and schools, as well as Epub books for the Blind SA Bookshare online Library. This intervention is key in ensuring that many visually impaired people who love reading do get access to reading material in their individually preferred formats. Blind SA makes every effort to provide quality braille, as we realise that quality braille is non-negotiable, especially in the case of material provided to learners at schools and students at universities.

Blind SA, together with Section27, managed to advocate and take government to Court over the unconstitutionality of the Copyright Act of 1978, in 2021 at the High Court in Pretoria and in 2022 (for the confirmation of the unconstitutionality of the Act), at the Constitutional Court, the highest Court on constitutional matters, among others. The Constitutional court confirmed the unconstitutionality of the Act, and henceforth blind people can enjoy unrestricted access to reading material by converting them to their preferred alternative formats.

* 1. BRAILLE RULES AFRIKAANS

This is one of the busiest committees of SABA. Regardless of the almost non-existent of SABA during the past years, this Committee remained focused and made notable in-roads on Afrikaans braille.

A significant part of the work of the Committee since the last General Assembly was largely on editing the manual, “Vereenvoudigde reëls vir Afrikaanse braille”. As a result of other matters having to take precedence, editing of the manual could not commence until the second term of 2023. Nevertheless, the editing was done quickly and efficiently in about two working days. This in turn led to the revisiting of certain subjects and the discovery of new issues that we initially hadn’t considered. The Committee also dealt with abbreviations and acronyms and bridging.

The Committee also looked at the Use of the contractions for *be, ge* and *te* when they are followed by a modified letter; use of lower contractions in conjunction with the forward slash; use of the contractions for *be, ge* and *te* when they bridge a root word and a suffix; use of the contractions for *die, ei, ie, oe* and *ui* when not pronounced as in standard Afrikaans (this is still not resolved, but it is hoped that a conclusion will be reached soon).

* 1. MUSIC COMMITTEE

The Music Committee was also relatively active. Most of the discussions led by the Chair of ICEB Music Committee were responded to by the Music Committee representative from South Africa.

1. CONCLUSION

As a newly elected Committee for the Authority, we trust that we will be able to correct all that went wrong during the past term, and to once again bring South Africa to its rightful place at ICEB. Confronted by multiple languages requiring significant but tailored attention, we will give sufficient focus to each one of them, by introducing new people to lead the different Committees. This intervention goes deep into the quest for the Authority to develop braille for all languages in South Africa.

I wish the 8th ICEB General Assembly a resounding success under the current president, Dr Judy Dixon and the whole of the ExCo.