isiNdebele Bible hits the shelves

MBOMBELA - You can now read the Bible in isiNdebele, thanks to a public-private partnership.

The Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation and Bible Society of South Africa will officially launch the isiNdebele Bible on Saturday, 24 November at Solomon Mahlangu Stadium in KwaMhlanga, starting at 9:00. Gospel superstar, Solly Mahlangu will perform on the day.

The launch of the isiNdebele Bible means the Holy Book is now available in all 11 official languages of South Africa. The first Bible to be translated into an indigenous language was Setswana in 1857.

Language enthusiasts and the Christian community have described the release of the isiNdebele Bible as godsend. The need for the isiNdebele bible was identified by Father Elijah Mtsweni in the 1970s which saw the Gospel of Mark translated in 1977 by DR EA Hermanson and Mr JS Mabena. In 1986, Mabena, Rev EK Mtsweni and Ms H Eschen translated the New Testament and a selection of Psalms.

After a 26-year hiatus, Ps David Mahlangu, Ps Peter Mabena and Prof Andries Breytenbach took it upon themselves to deliver the first ever isiNdebele Bible. They were supported by a team of review committee, including language purists, which met regularly to work through the text prepared by the translators and make recommendations. It took the team a year to deliver the final manuscripts and this was done at the beginning of this year.

“We are delighted that the Bible is now available in isiNdebele. This will encourage isiNdebele-speaking people to take pride in their language. Also, it means more people would be able to read the Bible in their own language. This is good news for the growth and preservation of isiNdebele,” says Culture, Sport and Recreation spokesperson, Ms Sibongile Nkosi.

CEO of the Bible Society of South Africa, Rev Gerrit Kritzinger is equally excited about the developments. “This is a historic event for the Bible Society. One million isiNdebele speakers will now have access to a Bible in their own language for the very first time.”

To mark this momentous occasion, the Bible Society has announced that the Bible will retail for R25 during the launch.

The consignment of the Bibles arrived in the country on 26 October from Nanjing, China where they were printed at Amity Printing Company, which is owned by a Christian Foundation. Bible societies worldwide have a 25 percent share in the company.

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