

ADDRESS BY MPUMALANGA PREMIER TSP MAKWETLA AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE 2005 WORLD GOLD PANNING CHAMPIONSHIPS

Pilgrim's Rest, 19 September 2005

Programme Director

Chairperson of the World Gold Panning Association

Provincial Culture, Sports and Recreation MEC Nomsa Mtsweni

The Mayor of Thaba Chweu and Councillors present here today

Participating Teams and Officials,

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is an honour and a privilege to welcome everyone who is here today, individually and severally, to the legendary town of Pilgrim's Rest. I am delighted to be part of the proceedings at the opening of this global sporting spectacle featuring competitors, supporters and officials from as many as 20 countries and various communities around the world.

Today the gold panning championships have finally come to South Africa, to Africa – to communities where the mining of gold is also an integral part of their heritage. It is perhaps fitting that this week-long championships, come at a time where, by all indications, the outlook for the fortunes of our country, and indeed our continent, could not have been more brighter.

We say thank you to the World Global Panning Association for the honour it has bestowed on our country, and our province, Mpumalanga, by allowing us to serve as the host for the 2005 Championships. It is our firm belief that they could not have chosen a better place, for not only showcasing this event to the world at large, but also reflecting the rise of gold panning as a sport that has the ability to capture the attention and imagination of millions world wide. This is indeed a positive affirmation of South Africa as a serious gold panning country of note and a world player in the production of gold.

I have been so lucky to witness with my own eyes today's street parade and tonight's offerings of entertainment, that are part of this magnificent event. I remain confident that we have a team in place and the appropriate levels of commitment to ensure that all of you, from the players to the officials, supporters, and even those viewing the proceedings from the comfort of their homes, will enjoy truly successful championships.

We are hopeful that once again we will draw on the resourcefulness and warm hospitality of our communities here in Mpumalanga who will make sure that at all times you are made to feel at home. Indeed we know that the people of this area will make you feel no less fortunate that you have left your homes and families and have travelled to join us in this sporting extravaganza.

The name 'Mpumalanga' or "the place of the rising sun" will hopefully be forever etched in your memories of the 2005 World Gold Panning Championship, irrespective of whether you win or not, as a competitor, official or mere spectator.

By many accounts we are a part of the country that is truly coming of age and building our reputation as a place where there is a growing recognition of our rich history and scenic wonders, ancient and modern achievements that make our heritage.

Our country is a younger member of the global gold panning family, but we are fully committed to the growth of this sport and to realise its enormous potential for the promotion of human solidarity and friendships among nations.

At a time when the global community increasingly realizes our interconnectedness and how our fortunes, livelihoods, and security are interdependent, events such as this 2005 World Gold Panning Championship are important to bring together people from diverse backgrounds and cultures to nurture mutual respect and understanding.

The success of this year's championships will not only serve to grow the sport in our respective countries, but will hopefully leave a memorable legacy in the town of Pilgrim's Rest through the small and big things this town will acquire as a result of this singular endeavour.

WELCOME TO SOUTH AFRICA. WELCOME TO MPUMALANGA

Please brace yourself for a feast of sport and culture over the next seven days. I wish to enjoin all of you not to simply confine yourselves to Pilgrim's Rest, but to feel welcome to explore all that our province has to offer, including our rich historical and cultural heritage, cuisine, and unrivalled natural beauty.

To those who will officiate at this Championship, I wish to extend our best wishes for the tournament and hope that you will receive all the co-operation you need for fair adjudication. To all the participants in this years Championship, I wish to congratulate you for being selected by your respective countries and associations. We wish you all the best in your efforts as teams and as individuals. We know that you will serve as excellent ambassadors for your countries.

When the games shall have ended, please take back with you warm regards and well-wishes to your countries and people, from the people of this town and our province, Mpumalanga. May the best team win.

I am now honoured to declare the 2005 World Gold Panning Championships officially open.

I thank you.