

Canadian educators visit Foundation

Delegation gains information to take back to Canada



Mothomang Diaho holds the glass Inukshuk presented to the Foundation by the Canadian educators

March 20, 2008 – A delegation of 25 Canadian educators who are passionate about South Africa and helping children realise their dreams visited the Nelson Mandela Foundation this week to learn more about the work of the Foundation's [Memory](#) and [Dialogue](#) programmes.

The delegation's visit to South Africa was organised by the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund in [Canada](#) and in [South Africa](#). The group consisted of principals, teachers and representatives of school boards and steering committees, which are associated with the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund in Canada.



Representative of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund in Canada, **Zeib Jeeva**, tells Mothomang Diaho about their work

The visit to the Foundation concluded a week of touring for the delegation, which included learning about and visiting Nelson Mandela Children's Fund projects. The Children's Fund and Nelson Mandela Foundation are sister organisations.

Head of the Foundation's Memory Programme, Verne Harris, head of the Dialogue Programme, Dr Mothomang Diaho, and Information Systems Manager Senior Programmes Officer, Shadrack Katuu, facilitated the visit to the Foundation. CEO Achmat Dangor was also present.

Harris explained the history of the Foundation, as well as the roles and work of [46664](#), the [Mandela Rhodes Foundation](#), the [Children's Fund](#) and the [Nelson Mandela Institute for Education and Rural Development](#).

Katuu explained the development of the Memory Programme's archive portal, a repository of archival materials relating to Mr Mandela and comprising items as diverse as databases and gifts given to Mr Mandela. The portal documents all information and resources the Foundation has linked to Mr Mandela and the apartheid struggle. Harris said the archive would be particularly important for young people who in the digital age had a "superficial engagement with the past".



Delegation leader, Dean Bodkin, presents an Inuit Inukshuk to Mothomang Diaho and Verne Harris of the Nelson Mandela Foundation

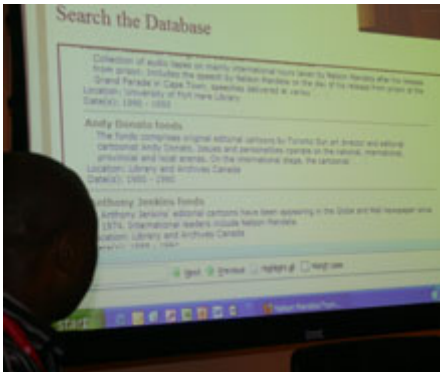
"I think we've been too quick to close the book on the past and move forward," said Harris.

He explained that the role of the Foundation was not to focus solely on Mr Mandela's life, but to always consider him as part of a collective.

Diaho spoke briefly about the work of the Dialogue Programme, adding: "Dialogue is a critical public resource needed desperately in our country. Despite our history, we still talk past each other. Our work is largely informed by the values and principles of Mr Mandela."

Diaho showcased to the group booklets recently published by the Foundation including [Dignity and Justice for All](#), a booklet on human rights in Africa today, and [Caring Schools](#), a booklet on best practice in the field of rural education in South Africa.

The members of the delegation were encouraged to ask questions about the Foundation's work. After the meeting, individuals reflected on what the visit meant for them.



Shadrack Katuu illustrates the Foundation's archive portal to the delegation, using the search word "Canada"

Jeeva said the visit to the Foundation was organised so the educators could learn more about Mr Mandela's charities. "We wanted to give the delegation a better feel of what Madiba has put in place, and what work he's been doing," he said. "Most of the delegation is interested in the history of South Africa, especially with regards to the Spirit of Mandela Week."

South Africa's consul general in Canada, Nogolide Nojozi, is based in Toronto, and accompanied the group on their visit to South Africa. "We are here to support and endorse the cause of the Nelson Mandela Children's Fund and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. Everyone in this delegation is seeking to assist South Africa's development."

Diaho said she was always pleased to welcome visitors to the Foundation. "The Foundation is continuously encouraged by partners and visitors such as this delegation. We truly value these visits because in every single one, there are always valuable comments regarding our work."

Sylvia Balicki-Jones, of the York Region District School Board in Ontario, said the trip to South Africa had provided her with information to share with colleagues and students on her return. "I will be able to use this information to raise awareness and funds for the Children's Fund. Our school board uses the values of Mr Mandela to help form leaders for life."



Verne Harris and Shadrack Katuu explain the work of the Foundation to the delegation, including South African consul general in Canada, Nogolide Nojozi

Leader of the group and special project co-ordinator of the Spirit of Mandela Week, Dean Bodkin, said he was impressed by the enduring optimism of South Africans. "Even though [South Africans] have gone through struggles like apartheid, AIDS, and poverty, it's inspiring that they are finding ways to move forward, that they are motivated to improve their lives. Things are happening in this country, students are smart! They need programmes that will allow them to reach their full potential. We in Canada need to work together to ensure that South Africans reach their dreams."

Bodkin added: "South Africa is a beautiful country with beautiful people. The people that we met were full of optimism and committed to making things better for everyone."

Toronto Catholic District School Board representative, Catherine Bernadette LeBlanc Miller, said she loved being in South Africa. "The passion that I saw was great. The Hector Pieterse Museum touched me personally because it struck me how children were directly affected as segregation and Afrikaans in schools was enforced. I have three kids of my own who would have been classified as "coloured" during the apartheid era, so the visits to the [Hector Pieterse and Apartheid] museums affected me personally."

LeBlanc Miller continued, "South Africa is a big and beautiful country. I loved the fact that everyone is politically aware. The youth we met had strong opinions about what's happening and what should be happening. Yes, apartheid is gone but there are still gaps between the haves and the have-nots that need to be closed. What also stood out for me was how common our problems are. We also have problems with teenage pregnancies, alcohol addiction, hopelessness, and land claims. I'm taking the knowledge and solutions that I have seen here back to implement in my country."



Educator Sylvia Balicki-Jones presents the Foundation with wrapped sets of Canadian coins

Ken Shigeishi, also representing the York Region District School Board, is vice-principal of the Stephen Lewis Secondary School in Ontario. He said it was wonderful to see how funds donated to the Children's Fund had benefitted projects. "South Africans are very welcoming and that's been very heart-warming. It's phenomenal to see that the funds we have donated have made a difference in the lives of the youth and children of this country."

The delegation presented gifts to the Nelson Mandela Foundation in honour of Mr Mandela's 90th birthday. Balicki-Jones presented several collections of the Canadian coin series, wrapped and signed by the

delegation. The gift was symbolic of the Toonies that will be collected by the schools during the Spirit of Mandela Week.

Dean Bodkin presented the Foundation with a small glass sculpture of an Inuit Inukshuk.

He explained the symbolism of the Inukshuk: "The native people from North of Canada (Nunavut) have gone through challenges similar to South Africans. When they go through their nomadic route they put these rocks along the shoreline. This allows them to find their way back home. This gift symbolises the fact that we all on a journey and even though we move in different ways, we need markers to show us where we are so that we can arrive back home safely."