***CENTREPOL* SEMINAR**

**University of Pretoria**

**REMEMBERING SOWETO**

**JUNE 16, 1976**

**WHERE ARE WE TODAY REGARDING THE LANGUAGES OF SOUTH AFRICA?**

Most of us (older South Africans) still remember the Soweto uprising on 16 June, 1976.

*Wikipedia* describes the incident as follows

“The **Soweto Uprising**, also known as **16 June**, (was) a series of protests led by high school students in South Africa that began on the morning of 16 June 1976. Students from numerous Sowetan schools began to protest in the streets of [Soweto](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soweto) in response to the introduction of [Afrikaans](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Afrikaans) as the medium of instruction in local schools. An estimated 20,000 students took part in the protests. The number of people who died is usually given as 176, with estimates of up to 700. 16 June is now a public holiday, Youth Day, in South Africa, in remembrance of the events of 1976.”

Given ***the fundamental role of language in community development, inter-relationships and inter-group co-operation*** in South Africa, *CentRePoL*, the Centre for Research in the Politics of Language at the University of Pretoria, has decided to arrange a commemoration of the event.

**AIM OF THE SEMINAR**

**How far have we progressed with the promotion and development of the languages of South Africa after 18 years of democracy?**

***The proposed programme for the event is as follows***:

**PROGRAMME**

**Tuesday 10 June 2014**

**TIME: 14:00 to 17:00**

**PLACE:** **GRADUATE CENTRE**

**ROOM: L1-70**

**Main campus**

**Chair: Prof. Vic Webb, Director: *CentRePoL***

14:00: Welcoming and introduction: Prof. Norman Duncan, Dean, Faculty of Humanities, UP

14:10: Brief overview of proposed seminar: Prof. Vic Webb, *CentRePoL*, UP

14:20: Mr. Colin Chabane, Minister of Monitoring and Evaluation, Office of the President: Some words of support.

14:30: *The experiences of home language speakers of the African languages*:

**Zulu** **Ms. Noma Ndabezitha**

**Sesotho sa Leboa / Sepedi Ms. Sally Maepa**

15:15: *What is the view from Afrikaans, today, 18 years later?*

 **Dr.** **Danny Titus (Executive director, Culture, ATKV)**

15:30: General discussion:

*What needs to be done about the maintenance, promotion and development of languages other than English (LoTE) in South Africa by 2016, 20 years after the declaration of South Africa’s new national language policy?*

16:00: Response by the Public Protector’s Office

16:30: Closure

**SOME BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

**(Excerpted from Wikipedia)**



The uprising began in Soweto when black high school students protested against the “*Afrikaans Medium Decree”* of 1974, which was directed at making Afrikaans and English equal media of instruction in all schools of the former Department of [Bantu Education](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bantu_Education_Department) from 1 January 1975. Afrikaans, for example, had to be used for mathematics, arithmetic and social studies from standard five (7th grade), whilst English would be used for general science and practical subjects (homecraft, needlework, woodwork, metalwork, art, agricultural science). Indigenous languages would only be used for religion instruction, music, and physical culture.

The decree was resented deeply by black South Africans, because Afrikaans was widely viewed as "the language of the oppressor". The association of Afrikaans with [apartheid](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apartheid) prompted black South Africans to prefer English. Even the [homeland](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bantustan) regimes chose English and an indigenous African language as official languages. In addition, English was gaining prominence as the language most often used in commerce and industry. The 1974 decree was intended to forcibly reverse the decline of Afrikaans among black Africans.

The resentment grew until 30 April 1976, when children at [Orlando West Junior School](http://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Orlando_West_Junior_School&action=edit&redlink=1) in Soweto went on strike, refusing to go to school. Their rebellion then spread to many other schools in Soweto. Black South African students protested because they believed that they deserved to be treated and taught equally to white South Africans ….. Students (then) formed an Action Committee (later known as the Soweto Students' Representative Council) which organised a mass rally for 16 June to make themselves heard.

On the morning of **16 June 1976**, between 10,000 and 20,000 black students walked from their schools to Orlando Stadium for a [rally](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demonstration_%28people%29) to protest against having to learn through Afrikaans in school. … (The) students sang and waved placards with slogans such as, "Down with Afrikaans", "Viva [Azania](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Azania)" and "If we must do Afrikaans, [Vorster](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/B._J._Vorster) must do [Zulu](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zulu_language)".

The police loosed their dogs on the protesters, who responded by stoning the dogs to death. The police then began to shoot directly at the children.

One of the first students to be shot dead was 13-year-old [Hector Pieterson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hector_Pieterson). He was shot at Orlando West High School and became the symbol of the Soweto uprising. The police attacks on the demonstrators continued and 23 people, including two white people, died on the first day in Soweto.

The number of people who died is usually given as 176 with estimates up to 700. The original government figure claimed only 23 students were killed, the number of wounded was estimated to be over a thousand people.

Images of the riots spread all over the world, shocking millions. The photograph of [Hector Pieterson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hector_Pieterson)'s dead body caused outrage and brought down international condemnation of the Apartheid government.

As we also know, South Africa has a longer history of internal clashes. Besides the Khoikhoi-Dutch clashes, the Xhosa wars, the Anglo-Boer War, the [Sharpeville massacre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sharpeville_massacre) of 1960, we have also experienced the uprisings of 1976, the murder of Steve Biko and the imprisonment of Nelson Mandela.