



South African Library Week: Brief History and Overview

LIASA through its diverse membership is driving the process to make SA Library Week a celebration of our country's intellectual and literacy heritage. Libraries across the country use this annual event as an opportunity to market their services to the users, the broader community, civil society and also decision makers.

SA Library Week was initiated in 2001 by LIASA to be a commemorative period recognized by government when all types of libraries across the country use it as an opportunity to market their services in an effort to contribute to the understanding of the important role that libraries play in a democratic society, advancing literacy, making the basic human right of freedom of access to information a reality, and to promote tolerance and respect among all South Africans.

After extensive consultation with the membership the following proposal was accepted:

“That the week within which 20 March falls should be national library Week. In the event of this day falling within a weekend, then the week preceding it would be celebrated as national Library Week.”

The choice of the date was based on research into the history of libraries in South Africa:

The South African Public Library, now known as the National Library of South Africa (Cape Town Campus) was the first library to be established in South Africa. This was done by a government proclamation on 20 March 1818. The South African Library in fact started off as a true public library and has established itself as a pioneering institution in South African library history.

Furthermore, we celebrate Human Rights Day on 21 March and our Bill of Rights recognizes the freedom of access to information as a basic human right. We are therefore able to link an important historical event with a crucial date in our new democracy.

This proposal was strongly supported by the then Department of Arts, Culture Science and Technology, which further proposed that the Week be renamed South African Library Week. SA



Library Week was officially celebrated for the first time in 2002 and has become a very important date on the national LIASA calendar. Since then SALW was driven by LIASA and celebrated nationally every year. LIASA confirms the dates and theme every year.

SALW 2002-2017 THEMES

2002: "Free your mind – Read!" 18 – 23 March 2002

2003: "Your Right to Read!" 17 – 22 March 2003

2004: "Libraries in a Decade of Democracy" 15 – 22 March 2004

2005: "Libraries: opening the doors of learning and culture to all" 14 – 21 March 2005

2006: "Libraries: partners in learning, nation building and development"

2007: "Libraries: Your key to the future" 13 – 20 March 2007

2008: "From local to Global @ your library" 17-22 March 2008

2009: "Access for all @ your library" 16-21 March 2009

2010: "Reading changes lives" 20-26 March 2010

2011: "Read in your language @ your library" 19-26 March 2011

2012: "Develop @ your library" 17 - 24 March 2012

2013: "Educate Yourself @ your library" 16 - 23 March 2013

2014: "Celebrating Libraries in 20 years of democracy: Check in @ your library" 15 - 22 March 2014

2015: "Connect @ your library" 14 - 21 March 2015

2016: "#libraries4lifelonglearning" 11 – 21 March 2016

2017: My Library, Your Library 18 – 26 March 2017