



## **Minister Nathi Mthethwa: Launch for Heritage Month**

07 Sep 2020

Minister speaker notes: media launch for Heritage Month

Program Director

Deputy Minister: Ms N Mafu.

Director General: Mr V Mkhize.

Members of the media here present

Ladies and gentlemen.

This week marks the commencement of Heritage Month under the theme: "celebrating South Africa's living human treasures".

As the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture, it is our responsibility to ensure that there is proper observance of the national commemorative program of government, inclusive of the national days, as determined by the Public Holidays Act of 1994, and of which the Heritage Day is one.

In terms of the rationale for our commemorative program, national days included, government looks to the national days, like Heritage Day, as one of the strategic levers through which to foster social cohesion and nation building. As it is self-evident that the remnants of our divisive past remain stubbornly present as part the day-to-day lived experience, government looks to the national days, like Heritage Day, as strategic platforms

of convergence that can bring the disparate parts of South African society together, regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, language or any other extraneous consideration.

It is a well known fact that under colonialism and apartheid, diversity in the human species was not celebrated. Instead, colonialism and apartheid created a racialized social structure wherein heritage and culture of some groups was celebrated, while other groups' existence and their culture was denigrated. To be precise, most of our heritage landscape over the many years of colonial and apartheid rule depicted a South Africa that was European, white and macho – to the exclusion of the vast majority of the people of this country, mainly black. That is, while the country geographically located in the African continent, it had always drawn sustenance, inspiration and self-identity from outside the continent, mainly in Europe – while rendering invisible the indigenous people of this country, including their ways of life, their culture, their heritage, and their epistemologies – that is, forms of knowledge and modes of knowledge transmission.

Given this commitment, it is unsurprising that the 2020 theme for Heritage Month is: "Celebrating South Africa's living human treasures". In celebrating living human treasures, we celebrate the bearers of our indigenous knowledge systems. In other words, we seek to affirm the view held in much of African thought that indigenous peoples from time immemorial had an epistemology and a science or method of knowledge transmission – even though these were dismissed and decimated by Western imperialism as it sought to entrench its hegemony on indigenous people. During this month and beyond (through a variety of schemes in the Heritage Preservation and Promotion branch in the Department) we will double-up the effort in ensuring that these suppressed knowledge forms receive the recognition and support they deserve; not only for aesthetic reasons, but also because of the potentiality of their political economy.

Speaking of living human treasures, I will, just in a few minutes, and as part of the program of this media launch, unveil three of our living human treasures whom we chose to celebrate today, as we shall launch their books. Most appropriately, they are all women who have distinguished themselves in their chosen fields of artistic occupation, putting South Africa on the map on the global stage and these are Dr Esther Mahlangu, Mama Madosini Latozi Mphaleni and Mama Ouma Katrina Esau.

Given the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic and the challenges this has imposed on women and girls, we deemed it necessary that we highlight this as part of the key messages for Heritage. That is, we must be quite forceful and unequivocal about our stance against all forms of GBV during this month and beyond, particularly given the fact that GBV exponentially spiked during the hard national lockdown, as women and girls found themselves in an entrapment with their abusers, and without much reprieve. I am happy therefore that most of the activations that are part of marking Heritage Month also speak to this very issue of GBV, especially femicide, and the need to roll out mass campaigns to rid society of this scourge.

As has been intimated already, GBV and femicide remain a challenge that needs urgent interventions, and as part of raising consciousness across society, the Department will continue to open platforms wherein open dialogues on GBV can be held, with the hope that as these messages against GBV and femicide are trumpeted relentlessly, these may overtime lead to positive behavioral change, especially with our menfolk, who, for the most part, are perpetrators of GBV and femicide. I am glad that we will later on and as part of this media launch host of panel discussion on this. I am particularly grateful that the panelists have so gracefully accepted our invitation to participate.

While the focus is clearly on living human treasures, we deemed it necessary also that we take a moment also and reflect about those human treasures who made such an immense contribution in the continent and from whom we continue to draw strength, courage and sustenance.

In that regard, this Heritage Month also affords us an opportunity to reflect on the journey travelled by many resistance and liberation struggle icons who brought freedom and democracy to our Nation. Most of these heroes and heroines were not only of South African origin but African descendants whose identity cuts across different racial lines. They who committed their lives to the liberation of all African people. Some of these icons had they been alive today, they would be celebrating their centenary. Amongst those, there is Mr Harry Gwala, Vuyisile Mini, Raymond Mhlaba, MP Naicker, P Ntantala Jordan, Robert Resha, EC Mondlane of Mozambique, and D Kimati of Kenya. Their contributions would forever be cherished.

And so, why do we celebrate and commemorate national days? To what end and for what purpose – some may ask. Through the national days program, and with Heritage Month in

particular, we see it as an ideal platform to right the colonial and apartheid wrongs. We see it as an ideal platform to telling the richness of the South African story in its fullness, and ensuring that those whose existence was rendered invisible and absent throughout the many years of colonialism and apartheid, also become part of the meta-narrative.

Our marching orders are derived from the Constitution of the Republic. In this regard, the Preamble is instructive in that it enjoins all of us to work towards healing the divisions of the past, as well as lay the foundations for a democratic and open society. This exhortation is expounded under Section 1 of the Constitution in terms of the founding values for a new society, including the values of non-racialism and non-sexism.

Drawing inspiration from the Preamble of the Constitution and Section 1 of the same Constitution, the vision of the NDP gives a strong affirmation in stating unequivocally in its vision statement that “in 2030, South Africans will be more conscious of the things they have in common than their differences”. In the context of Heritage Month in general, and Heritage Day in particular, diversity of our heritage is seen and celebrated as such, rather being seen as a problem.

The 2020 national Heritage Day also happens within the context of COVID-19 national emergency, which is also a global health emergency. Lives have been affected in more fundamental ways; with the vast majority of South Africans, especially black, poor and working class – out of work and in great distress.

As we observe this heritage month we need to be cognisant of the challenges thrown up by the outbreak of COVID-19. Together we shall overcome this challenge too.

Thank you for your attention.

Issued by: Department of Sport, Arts and Culture