**BACKGROUND**

The Truth & Reconciliation Commission (“TRC”) made a specific finding regarding judicial executions for political offences as follows:

*“The Commission finds that all executions of persons convicted of political offences and/or which were politically motivated in the mandate period constituted gross violations of the rights of those so killed, for which the former government is held accountable.*”   
(TRC Report, Vol 2, Chap 3, p 177)

There were 140 political prisoners who were hanged for politically-related offences in the period between 1960 and 1990, after which the death penalty was suspended. The state retained custody of the bodies of the deceased and their families were not allowed to receive or bury them. The state buried them as paupers in cemeteries around Tshwane.

Of the 140 hanged prisoners, 47 have already been exhumed by other parties, groups or individuals. The Missing Persons Task Team (“MPTT”) also exhumed the “Langa 6” (Poqo (PAC)) in 2010. There are thus 83 individuals whose remains are still to be recovered. The majority of these are were Poqo (PAC) members hanged in the 1960s, as well as UDF supporters hanged in the 1980s.

**GALLOWS PROJECT**

In 2011 the Minister of Correctional Services and the Department of Correctional Services (DCS) opened the Gallows Museum, a reconstruction of the old Gallows *in situ*, in Kgosi Mampuru Correctional Facility in Tshwane, at an event hosted by President Zuma. Representatives of all the families of hanged political prisoners were brought to attend the event.

The MPTT was a key partner in the above process and conducted extensive research aimed at locating the grave sites, using archival, prison and cemetery records. Professional surveyors from the City of Tshwane were also used by the MPTT to plot the graves, as most were buried in open fields with no visible grave numbers. The identified graves are located in two cemeteries, viz Rebecca Street cemetery and Mamelodi cemetery.

On the same day as the Gallows Event, the family representatives were taken to the two cemeteries and were shown the burial site identified by the MPTT as containing the remains of their family member.

An undertaking was made that the remains would be recovered by the MPTT and returned to the families for proper burial at a later stage. The nature of the exhumation process and the time frames were not specified.