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BOTSWANA REPORT

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Figure1: South African delegation at the South African High Commission

Introduction

The national heritage resources act empowers SAHRA to perform functions of a heritage resources authority outside the borders of South Africa. Section 5 (1)(a) of the National Heritage Resources Act 25 of 1999 (NHRA) stipulates that “Heritage resources have lasting value in their own right and provide evidence of the origins of the South African society and as they are valuable, finite, non-renewable and irreplaceable. It is against this background that they must be carefully managed to ensure their survival”.



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Purpose of the site visit

The National Department of Arts and Culture invited critical stakeholders to a preparatory meeting to deliberate on a concept document that will culminate in construction of the resistance and liberation heritage monuments in Botswana. On the 16th to 19th October 2018 Heritage Protection Unit, Burial Grounds and Graves, Department of Arts & Culture, Military Veterans, Department of Basic Education, Culture Arts, T A, African National Congress, Government of Botswana, National Archives, National Heritage Council, Freedom Park, Government Communications Information System and other departments held meetings and conducted various site visits at different sites in Botswana.

The delegation met the South African High Commissioner in Botswana on the 16th October 2018, the delegation was led by the Director General (DG) Mr Vusi Mkhize of the DAC. The high commissioner Ms Bulelwa Kiva welcomed South African delegation and expressed gratitude for the project that will be undertaken in Botswana. She further extended her support and emphasized that it is imperative that South African government implements the construction of the two monuments in Gaborone and Lobatse. The DAC delegation then proceeded to meet their counter parts at Botswana Department of Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation.

On the 17th November the South African delegation visited the Botswana national museum, and the DDG of Arts and Culture Mr Ndima made a presentation on the concept document and implementation plan. The Botswana Director of the national Museum was delighted about the concept document, he then introduced his team and critical stakeholders like the University of Botswana.



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The Fish Keitseng trust and University of Botswana was also afforded an opportunity to present information pertaining to the role of Botswana in the South African liberation struggle. There were various engagements which were positive towards the implementation of the concept document. The delegation then proceeded to a site visit to extension 14 cemetery led by Botswana National Museum. The delegation stopped at a mass grave of the victims of 1985 raid. Department of Military Veterans and the African National Congress raised concerns about civilians who were buried in a site that was apparently granted to the ANC for victims of 1985 raid. Mr fish Keitseng is also buried at the site and it was alleged that the trust has a permit of the site. The matter was rather contradictory as with South African Heritage legislation permits were granted for burials not to trusts. It was then decided that the matter be investigated in order to understand the Botswana heritage legislation on management of burial grounds and graves.

It was further discovered that the graves of the 14 June 1985 raid ANC cadres were constructed by North West Department of Cultural Affairs and Traditional Affairs(CATA) without SAHRA's involvement. These are the graves of national significance that SAHRA was supposed to be notified merely because SAHRA's is the only heritage body that can perform functions of a heritage outside the borders of South Africa. The graves are well conserved except outcry about inscriptions and an unknown grave inside the fence of the 1985 massacre graves. The portion of land at grave site belongs to South Africa and the site is declared under the Botswana heritage act which gives individual ownership not national status ownership.

Department of Military Veteran together with the African National Congress want the grave site to be declared by the South African National Heritage Resources Act no 25 of 1999 for formal protection. The rationale is that Botswana heritage act allows individuals to take decisions about the national assets without consulting other stakeholders. For example, the 1985 raid graves are buried with other cadres who were not part of the raid such as Mr Fish Keitseng and Mr Bethuel Lesiea.



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Figure 2: Grave of fallen compatriots of South Africa who died in the 1985 Raid in Botswana Gaborone extension 14 cemetery





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Figure 3: Grave of Z. K. Matthews who we taught is a South African, only to find out his was the citizen of Botswana and his original surname is Dinku.



The delegation then travelled to Peleng where Mr Nathaniel Serache , a military veteran narrated the brutality they suffered under the apartheid government. He informed the delegation about one fateful night where they were bombed inside a house they were renting in Botswana. The explosion was so bad that it damaged the whole street and surrounding areas. Despite the bombing he and the other cadre survived the attack and he lived to tell the story. Clearly this how people died and fought for the liberation of South Africa and such history is documented hence the national heritage resources act was enacted for reparation and nation healing. SAHRA therefore has an obligation to assist other state departments to identify graves of fallen heroes outside the country and reinter their remains within the republic of South Africa.



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SAHRA should consider to also inspect these sites and build monuments for better presentation, education and research. On the 18th October the delegation travelled to Lobatse in Botswana to meet the Mayor of Lobatse and present the concept document. The Mayor agreed with the restoration in principle. He cited the cultural agreement that exists between South Africa and Botswana. The presentation was well received as it would bring development in Botswana. The Mayoral delegation informed the South African delegation that as government they are mindful of economic challenges that Lobatse town is facing, thus the concept would be presented to the Botswana cabinet for endorsing.

Mr Ndima from the DAC further reiterated that Lobatse was the first town where the ANC had its first conference after being banned by the apartheid government. Therefore this project is about paying homage and also a pilgrimage. The SA government is henceforth proposing to construct two monuments to remind the world about the contribution of Botswana in the liberation struggle. Mr Themba Wakashe from the ANC expressed his appreciation of the honour bestowed on South Africans during the apartheid regime. There were further engagements and then a site visit undertaken to Fish Keitseng house and the house where Mkhondo We Siswe was formed. The site was refurbished but the authenticity was completely lost as the material utilized looks modern.



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Figure 4: Fish Keitseng house in Lobatse a hiding place for several ANC cadres all former Presidents of SA and others and the ANC held their 1st Congress out of S.A in 1962.





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Conclusion

SAHRA was requested to have further discussions with the Department of Military Veterans, Freedom park, NHC and ANC about the declaration of the graves, construction of monuments and possible repatriation.

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