

## **HERITAGE TOURIST GUIDING – ROOT AND ROUTE OF MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING**

REMARKS BY

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AT THE WORLD TOURIST GUIDE DAY CELEBRATIONS

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Programme Director

Honourable Deputy Minister, Hon. Ms T Xasa

Leadership of National Department of Tourism

Leadership of the Robben Island World Heritage Site

Tour Guides, Site Interpreters

Former Colleagues and Colleagues from Robben Island, Robben Island Mandela Museum, Heritage Sector

Distinguished Friends and All protocol observed

Thank you to National Department of Tourism for the Opportunity to be part of this incredible event, congratulations and thanks to Uveshnee and her colleagues for the unforgettable work they are doing with Tourist guides, site interpreters and first testimony people.

It is really special to be back on the Island, 20 years after we had the privilege to be part of the teams that closed the prison and opened a Museum and Heritage Site.

What a special time to be meeting on this important treasure of humanity that bears exceptional testimony to generations of suffering and to triumph of the human spirit over adversity, at the intersection of the month that is known as Black History Month in the USA and the month that is known as Human Rights Month in South Africa, so soon after the muted commemoration of the remarkable life of Robert Sobukwe – that distinguished Africanist, in this the year of the centenary of OR Tambo, on the eve of the centenary of Nelson Mandela, in this the year of the

centenary of the Bolshevik Revolution that mainstreamed, rural and poor people, normalized universal access to education, electricity, health, housing, social solidarity and triggered other contradictions – which are not part of today.

When the task to speak on a Root of Mutual Understanding – we considered that we can be working with a Root for Anchor and a Route for a Journey.

I work for the National Heritage Council of South Africa, an agency of the National Department of Arts and Culture on something called the Liberation Heritage Route. The National Heritage Council has a vision of a people proud of their African heritage. The liberation route is a network of places, people, events and memories that offer durable testament to the struggle for freedom in South Africa, Africa and the world. The conceptual approach of the LHR proposes long term structured contributions and participation by different departments, IGR spheres, agencies and sectors of society. Out of this has been established an Inter Ministerial Cabinet Committee chaired by Arts and Culture, where Tourism is a distinguished member. The concept proposes an investment approach to heritage rather than a cost approach.

I am responsible for facilitating – with a diverse team – the World Heritage Enlistment in stages of parts of Africa's and South Africa's Liberation Heritage Route. I have been following the ways in which guiding, site interpretation and testimony have intersected in heritage sites, especially sites of conscience.

Today I speak in my personal capacity.

I consciously separate between the related areas of Guiding, Site Interpretation, Testimony and Education because each of these are arrived at in different ways. It would appear that the ones that carry the most accreditation are Guiding and Education. I would like our colleagues and leaders from Tourism to think of appropriate mechanisms for recognizing under a different but related regime of Site Interpreters and First Person Testimony Bearers. It does not appear to me always fair that all the tests a tour guide must pass – are all relevant to a first person narrator, a survivor of a place like Robben Island or a practitioner or a traditional or other real heritage.

Heritage Routes help us navigate layers of significance across generations.

Heritage is often expressed in family trees, is a Root of human continuity between and amongst generations. Heritage is therefore in many ways an anchor of a people and peoples between past and future generations. This root can link us to all kinds of values – positive and negative depending where we each stand.

The topic proposed by the National Department of Tourism of “Root of Mutual Understanding” is very very significant and important to all of us because of the true ways in which heritage and tour guiding can be the route and root of all understanding.

I say CAN advisedly, because:

- Heritage has been so terribly abused to promote genocide, to keep people apart, to maintain superiority and inferiority
- Heritage has been such an important root of chauvinism, jingoism, exclusion, domination, colonization, marginalization, separation, etc

So we must use heritage and heritage guiding with care, because it is such a potent tool in the negative and in the positive sense.

The pains of the past as seen in the story of South Africa, in the story of Robben Island and the story of humanity in slavery, in colonialism, and other related isms – should really wake us up to take action to irrigate and sustain heritage as a Root of Mutual Understanding and walk the Route of Mutual Understanding.

Heritage and Heritage Tourist Guiding will succeed when we work in ways that ensure that Never Again, when we take a page from the preamble of South Africa’s constitution which starts off with the words: “We the people of South Africa, recognizing the injustices of the past, honouring those who sacrificed for freedom ... through our elected representatives adopt this constitution, [so as to build a united South Africa]. Achievement of mutual understanding in contexts where so much has been invested in achieving division, hatred, prejudice, mutual suspicion requires focussed concerted effort. It requires a universal commitment to Never Again. It requires and offers an opportunity to ensure that these painful experiences are resources for healing, for teaching against repetition of the past, for proof of how unsustainable abuses of heritage are, and for proof of the value of a diverse people uniting.

Heritage and Heritage Tourist Guiding are part of a powerful root for mutual understanding when the guides and the heritage tourism system achieves sustainable working together of Heritage and Tourism, when the messages conveyed are tuned to and customized to the level of the audience at the time. This being the case means in practice – the same message would be conveyed differently to Grade R learners, than to survivors of the same experience, perpetrators, international visitors, university students, non-school people. This is not about dunning down, it is about appropriate messaging, making an appropriate connection with the audience.

This reminds me of a very gifted tour guide who served in the early days of Robben Island World Heritage Site, who used to open his tour with “what countries are you all from ? .... Do you know that the Island has something to do with all your countries.” And however unusual or different a country is – he would proceed to find and express impromptu something about most of the countries and the Island. It was truly amazing and unforgettable.

Without tour guides – we would never know the opportunities, complexities, layers of significance in a heritage site, object or phenomenon. Tour Guiding is an absolutely strategic part of the conservation on the Heritage and Tourism Value Chain. The sites, experiences, objects don't speak – most of the time until their language is opened up for us through the work of tourism.

I have heard many times, I hope it is true – that – tourists travel to many places so as to find different experiences, in those different experiences to also find something in common.

The complex, learned, curious audiences that populate Tours these days in search of mutual understanding demand that tour guides – however specialized have eclectic knowledge, are curious, are interested, have appropriate humour, are sensitive. Many of the winners of the Lilizela awards make the point that “the tourist is someone who has invested their last money or a lot of money and valuable time to come and learn, enjoy and achieve mutual understanding – therefore you must make it worth it.” I found this very - very important and striking and touching.

For Tourist Guiding and Heritage to realise their potential as the root of mutual understanding – I think we need this level of intersection of empathy, value, respect, enthusiasm, knowledge and energy. For a country that is addressing challenges of poverty, inequality and unemployment and industry like tourism which has hit the 10 million visitors mark last year opens new frontiers of possibility and a better life if we sustain it as we should. The addition of a new R120 million rands for MICE confirms that when a value proposition is demonstrable to meet the triple challenges that affect our society – resources can be invested. This is a clear call for the consolidation of the strengthening partnership between Heritage and Tourism.

Tourist Guiding and Heritage has the ability to and should leave us very aware of our common humanity as diverse as we all are. This is especially so for people in South Africa whose founding motto is “A diverse People Unite.” Let us go ahead and use heritage and tourist guiding associated with it to confirm and build our common humanity and in this way to realise the potential of heritage and tourism as a root of mutual understanding than a root of mutual destruction.

Congratulations and Thank you for hosting this important session, all of the best going forward. Heritage and Tour Guiding are definitely a root and route for mutual understanding we have to do what we must do.