



SOUTH AFRICAN NATIONAL DIALOGUE ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE HERITAGE SECTOR WITH FOCUS ON STATUES, SYMBOLS, PLACE NAMES THAT DEFINE OUR PUBLIC SPACES

Prelude

The Department of Arts and Culture under the leadership of Minister Nathi Mthethwa convened a national dialogue of a range of key stakeholders. This, in part, was a response to the recent debate and incidents surrounding the statues that primarily define our heritage landscape and public spaces. What started as a demand for the removal of Rhodes statue at UCT and a demand for the change of the name of Rhodes University spread to a demand for genuine and rapid transformation of the very essence of these institutions as well as widespread incidents of unlawful defacing of statues across the country. The national debate by those demanding a more radical transformation landscape was that it represented a colonial and apartheid past whereas some sections of our society felt that this was an indiscriminate attack of their cultural symbols and heritage. The dialogue wanted to create a space to reflect on the current state of our heritage and mechanisms of transforming the sector into an inclusive one that reflect the country's diversity, its history and struggles as well as the future symbolic representation that reflect more accurately our new national identity and aspirations.

The national dialogue was held on Friday 17 April 2015 at the Freedom Park in Pretoria within Tshwane Metro. A range of stakeholders that represented a cross-section of diverse views were invited and participated actively from 9am till 6pm. These include political parties, interest groups, traditional leaders and the youth formations. It was generally recognized that transformation process has been slow even though the legal framework existed, and therefore the call for speeding of transformation of South African heritage and cultural landscape was recognized as a national priority that should be effected to foster social cohesion and national identity.



Resolutions:

The following resolutions were adopted by participants after robust soul-searching and probing engagements.

1. Introduction of South Africa's key national symbols in schools for greater civic awareness and national consciousness. These symbols include the preamble of the constitution of the republic that was adopted in 1996; the flag include the national anthem.
2. Use of existing laws for the transformation, removal, transfer or replacement of any statue, public symbol or place name. Government and Stakeholders to make emphasis that the attacking and defacing of the statues as unlawful and criminal, and call for law enforcement to act to prevent these unlawful incidents and the communities to work with law enforcement agencies to report unlawful incidents and protect the symbols.
3. Ensure that special interest groups, political formations or cultural communities that seek to protect symbols should do so without incitement or re-introduction of symbols of the past regimes. Constructive engagement with the aim of resolving the issues within the context of nation-building than further polarization should be the key guiding principle.
4. Any change or effort to transform or preserve the National Symbols (statue, symbols, monuments and names) should be based on proper and effective consultation with all affected sectors of the society and it should also assist in public education that will ultimately foster multi-cultural consciousness, appreciation of the past injuries as well as our diverse heritage as well as the current imperative of building a society, nonracial, inclusive and just society.



5. In the event where certain symbols are removed from public spaces, it is preferred that a common park of symbols and statues with a thematic narrative of the evolution of our history be created as an inclusive space to properly reflect South African history. This approach is preferred than the one where each cultural group comes and collect what they think belongs to their heritage thus preserving separate histories and narratives than a common narrative of our history that will be mindful of sensitivities and diversity of our complex and yet common history. Such theme parks depicting our history should be established at national, provincial and local levels.
6. That it should not be assumed that removed statues will be dumped at the museums as this may both be logistically impossible and also pose a reputational risk for museums that may be viewed as dumping areas.
7. In the instances where, after an audit and consultation, there may be a need for disposal of some of the symbols and statues, these should also be guided by SAHRA removal and relocation guidelines as per SAHRA Act no ;;; of 1999 disposal policy than uncoordinated and unguided discretionary disposals.
8. Public symbols that hitherto had only reflected one section of our history should become more inclusive and reflect total history, this include and is not limited to war memorial of Anglo/Boer War or South African War of 1899-1902 (grave sites, concentration camps etc.), world wars as well as our battle sites across the country.
9. That transformation of the heritage landscape should preferably be informed and replaced by all inclusive symbols or themes such as justice, youth, women, peace, reconciliation etc. than individual historical figures. This should not preclude future symbols and statues that celebrate and Honour heroes and heroines that fought for justice and freedom.



10. A triumphalist approach should be discouraged as a principle of correcting the current skewed depiction of our heritage landscape.
11. Consideration of symbols of national importance should be informed by national consultation process.
12. On place names an audit of all offensive or hate names and others should be conducted and they should all be removed and a process to allow local communities to find replacement names after proper all inclusive consultations.
13. Identification of key proponents and protagonists of epic systems and moments of injustice with the aim of replacing them in public spaces where these may be deemed offensive or reminder of past injustices. Such a consideration of names, Statues and Symbols will follow and be informed by a nationwide consultative processes with all proper consideration and distinction between historical facts of injustice on an epic scale as well as need for preservation of heritage of diverse communities.
14. A need for a comprehensive documentation of transformation process which will include Names, Statues and Symbols that were transformed and those that are still in the process of transformation.
15. Capacity building of existing heritage institutions such as the South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) and Provincial Heritage Resources Authorities (PHRAs) as well as regulatory heritage structures at local level. Similarly, capacity building for Place Names institutions such as the South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC), Provincial Geographical Names Committees (PGNCs) and local institutions tasked with place names standardization and transformation.



16. Creation of a special purpose task team to assist with conceptualization, implementation and monitoring as well as impact assessment of a rapid process of transformation of the heritage landscape towards nation-building.
17. Review of existing laws to test their adequacy and appropriateness in responding to the current need for accelerated change of the current heritage landscape dominated by colonial and apartheid symbols.
18. Need for school curriculum change to adequately reflect South African history and heritage in all its diversity and complexity.
19. The departments of Arts and Culture, Basic Education and Higher Education and Training closely collaborate to ensure that transformation of national symbols, heritage, culture and education system is effected.
20. That the whole process should be driven with a sense of urgency that has a clear roadmap, milestones and verifiable targets. That consultations should not become open ended processes that begin to frustrate the very aim of addressing the issue of transformation of our public spaces towards an inclusive narrative dignity that depicts our unity in diversity.

