

Freedom PARK TRUST

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Freedom Park Trust Hosts Prayer Day for a South Africa Free of Xenophobia, Racism and Tribalism

11 June 2008, Pretoria, On Friday, 13 June 2008, at 9:00, Freedom Park Trust hosts a prayer day where religious leaders from various religions as well as the general public will unite to pray and intercede for xenophobia, racism and tribalism in South Africa. The event takes place at The Freedom Park on Salvokop in Pretoria.

Invitees include religious leaders from a number of faiths, including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Bahaiism and Judaism, as well as traditional healers. The programme starts with a ceremony during which religious leaders from the various faiths will intercede, followed by an opportunity for the general public to pray. Prayers and intercession will be followed by a ceremony during which candles will be lit in memory of the victims of xenophobia, racism and tribalism.

In a pledge to assist the nation in resolving the xenophobic and humanitarian crisis sweeping the nation, Dr Mongane Wally Serote, CEO of Freedom Park Trust, indicated that the prayer day is merely the first step in Freedom Park Trust's programme to address this matter. "The Freedom Park acts as an international icon of humanity and freedom and we will spare no effort to ensure that the violation of human rights is halted immediately."

Dr Serote called on all South Africans to demonstrate their proven ability to choose a road of communication and negotiations instead of violence in resolving the xenophobic atrocities that have swept the nation. "The South African nation is no stranger to what may seem impossibly charged situations. We have experienced situations that could have resulted in a civil war consuming our country, but each and every time we have opted for the humane route. It is time that we make a conscious decision to opt for that route again."

According to Dr Serote, the responsibility for resolving this matter does not rest solely with the powers that be. "As these are acts that influence each South African personally, we are all responsible for becoming involved, be that in our communities, our organisations, our religious groups or on an individual level. We need to have this issue out in the open. Shifting the responsibility is not a luxury that we as a country can afford – not when human rights are being violated right on our doorsteps."

Dr Serote believes that events such as this Prayer Day are uniquely South African as it allows for and encourages individuals from a diverse nation, regardless of religion, culture or race, to unite. "The programme launched by Freedom Park Trust of which this event is the first step, addresses three issues, namely xenophobia, racism and tribalism. We have identified these three issues as they are pivotal to the reconciliation and nation building process in our country. Reconciliation between the various races has received severe attention during the past few years, but it is equally important that we pay attention to reconciliation on other levels, such as reconciliation between the various tribes."

"All too often issues such as xenophobia, racism and tribalism result from ignorance and a fear of the unknown. The Freedom Park Trust calls on every South African to counteract this fear of the unknown with knowledge. The only way in which we can gain this knowledge is through communication, and more specifically, inter-cultural communication. Our past have set the bar and have shown us capable of respecting communication and negotiation over violence. The time has come for us to put down our weapons and start talking."

"The Freedom Park has been built on the pillars of humanity and freedom. As such, we are inviting all South Africans, be it on community, organisational or individual, to join forces. Members of the public in any capacity are thus welcome to contact us at info@freedompark.co.za or on www.freedompark.co.za with comments or suggestions.

The Freedom Park is currently open for visits. At present, entrance is free. Tours take place daily at 9:00, 12:00 and 15:00. For more information on tours and visits, call 079 837 9092 or email tours@freedompark.co.za.

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