



Week of Reconciliation

Theme: Genocide of the Khoi-San People

Venue: Eastern Cape

Address

Honourable

Honourable Members of the National Parliament and
Provincial Legislature

Honourable MECs Present

Executive Mayor and Chief Executive Mayors Present

Traditional Leaders

Leaders of Political Parties

Business Leaders

Faith Based Organisations

Labour Movement

Ladies and Gentlemen

All Protocol Observed

Programme Director:

Background to this year's Commemoration

The National Government has given free reign to the Freedom Park to manage the commemoration of December 16, the Day of Reconciliation.

Through consultative processes the Freedom Park was advised to extend the day to a week of a National Reconciliation event. This is done two-fold: (1) It enhances the message of reconciliation to the provinces (2) we have more time to include each province into a reconciliatory frame of mind.

To enhance the message of reconciliation and make truly meaningful, we should partner with the provinces in hosting the provincial commemorations. It is with hope and desire that the Freedom Park will deliver in its mandate to reconcile a country hurt by the evils of the past and join hands in the spirit of togetherness. As we gather

here in this province, we join all others at the same time hosting provincial commemorations.

With your permission, I will give a brief background on what we as the Freedom Park envisage for this day.

Reconciliation can only truly take place when people lay down arms, join hands and work towards a brighter future as one. Let us be honest: because of past evils, that path is long and arduous – some members both black and white have been hurt beyond repair. It is a sad truth that no amount of words can heal those atrocities: but we can alleviate the impact on future generations.

Our past will breed in silence. If the past isn't recognized no reconciliation will happen and our children will live the same fate of their forefathers. It will be a case of history repeating itself. The seed has been sown in the young minds, now all it needs is irrigation.

In our effort to honour and acknowledge the enormous debts our heroes and heroines made for our country we, the Freedom Park

commemorate their sacrifices in the pursuit of justice, peace and freedom through the 8 epochs of conflicts that ravaged our land.

That is the core ideal behind the Freedom Park.

South Africa has been through some of the most tumultuous wars since colonization. The Freedom Park, in its endeavour to remember all past deaths, divided South Africa's major wars into the 8 conflicts of our country. These conflicts are the basis for the speeches for provinces: Pre-colonial Wars, Genocide, Slavery, Wars of Resistance, Anglo-Boer (known as the South African) Wars, the 1st and 2nd World War and the Struggle for Liberation.

In addition, the Freedom Park has included an extra theme – that of Cleansing and Healing due to be conducted in the Free State. Extensive research culminates in each speech being tailor-made for the province in question. This keeps the speech focused and relevant.

It is the Freedom Park's hope that these commemorations at local level will inspire South Africans to embark on their own voyages of reconciliation.

As reflected in our mission statement, we:

“...provide as pioneering and empowering heritage destination that challenges visitors to reflect upon our past, improve our present and build on our future as a united nation.”

As Africans we must use our own heritage to define ourselves. That means breaking away from past religions, cultures and values and adopting an African philosophy. For too long has the African nation been regarded as savages in their outlook on life.

The Freedom Park Trust commenced operations in 2001 and is led by a Board of Trustees with CEO Dr Mongane Wally Serote with the approval of cabinet. Continuing from where the Truth and Reconciliation left off, the Freedom Park aims to immortalize the senseless tragedies that have shaped our country and aims at being a national and international icon of freedom, peace and humanity.

The Freedom Park is proud to be associated with the stakeholders in the various provinces and we look forward to your unwavering support of the project.

Genocide of the Khoi-San People

I am grateful to be given the opportunity to address this gathering on this wonderful day – the 16th December, Day of Reconciliation.

In so doing, we remember the sacrifices made by our heroes and heroines to ensure a day like this is possible for all South Africans to share as one unified country.

Please allow me to share my thoughts before we go forward with our programme.

In a country where so many ills have been committed against fellow country people of different races, this day symbolises a unity that should hold no prejudice. For bigotry is a systematic breaking down of all societies and people.

Genocide is one of the worst forms of brutality known to humankind. It involves the systematic breakdown of a culture, language or religion to the point of subjugation.

Genocide is used to 'rid' a country of 'undesirables' – a more brutal form of racism that uses horrendous violence in the implementation of a faction's beliefs. Genocide goes hand in hand with ethnic cleansing – the removal of an ethnic group from a country.

Genocide was highlighted during the Rwandan War of the early 1990s, which saw the eradication of ethnic groups from both societies. This war clarified the degradation the country still undergoes.

Closer to home, genocide has played a major role with regard to the Khoi-San people. Being the only true people who can claim ownership of the country, these people have undergone severe abuse from all sides of the political realm. Further, we dare not speak of national heritage and we ignore the grievous wrongs that were perpetrated to these fellow South Africans – part of the offspring in the so-called ‘Cradle of Mankind.’

The plight of the Khoi has been dismissed largely to their minority group. It is a sad fact that people will always target those who are viewed subservient to them – be it social stance or based on the colour of one’s skin.

The Khoi can also be regarded as being the first victims of racism in our country. When the European settlers arrived at the Cape in 1652, they came into contact with the Khoi community.

The settlers despised them and described them as sub-human, an oddity. This was most likely in reference to their coarse features and small stature.

The Khoi traditionally occupied most of the Eastern Cape and coastline of the Western Cape. Again, in a form of genocide, the settlers chased the communities far into the wastelands of the Kalahari, which has been the home of the Khoi ever since.

In our effort to reconcile the nation, we cannot only blame the European settlers for the atrocity. In an unfortunate turn, the African community added to this genocide by stripping these people of their culture. We see again that the past cannot be blamed one community, but it is the entire country's ill.

It was the same thinking that the Khoi were given derogatory names like Hottentots and Bushmen.

They were not left alone and were hunted like animals. Others died from disease including poverty. They were subjected to a campaign of genocide. Their land was taken away from them. The rich Khoi

(/Xam) language was undermined; this went along with centuries of oral traditions. This went along with their culture and way of life.

Sarah Bartman stands as a memorial to this cruel genocide. Born in 1789 in the Eastern Cape, Bartman was persuaded to board a ship for England. The government gave permission that she be taken to Europe to be exhibited as the “Hottentot Venus”.

In what can be described as the worst of human degradation, she was exhibited as a freak to curious Europeans, who found her features unusual. She died at the age of 27 in Paris.

Her remains were returned to South Africa in 2002 after an absence of 200 years. Her burial made an important statement by the way the South African government views its indigenous inhabitants.

The Khoi people have indeed provided us with the largest and oldest rock paintings in the world. This is why the Drakensberg Mountains like the Sterkfontein Caves have been recognized as a Heritage Site.

In the prevailing spirit of reconciliation, the Freedom Park wishes to celebrate the contribution of the Khoi people to the history of South Africa and urge them to take part in all elements of our democratic society.

The Freedom Park thanks you.