



Week of Reconciliation

**Theme: Celebrating Pre-colonial Societies
Achievements**

Venue: Limpopo

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.

Celebrating Pre-colonial Achievements

We stand before you on this momentous occasion to celebrate 11 years of our democracy ... and it is only fitting that we acknowledge the achievements our forefathers made for our country and indeed the continent.

It is with ever-increasing confidence that scientists are beginning to applaud the African continent as being the 'cradle of mankind.'

This early link was proven by the discovery of what looked like a 'fossilized monkey' circa 1924. After further scrutiny it was probable that it could have been the skull of a San person. What was of extreme interest to researchers was that the skull had a jagged hole in its skull consistent with the blow of a sharpened instrument. This discovery further proved that the manufacturer of implement had the intellect to construct an implement designed specifically for that purpose.

European history promotes a version of the African history as being technologically and ideologically inferior. This went a long in

perpetuating the belief (held even by Africans) that they were somehow inferior in relation to western standards of evolution.

That cannot be further from the truth. After subjecting the fossil to further analysis, it showed features mid-way between man and ape, even though no similar specimen had been recorded before.

The brain, although small, also showed human-like features. The forehead was smooth and vertical and the mouth did not jut forward. Archeologist, Raymond Dart concluded that the skull belonged to a member of an extinct ape family with characteristics similar to man.

The myth taught by Apartheid history was that black and white farmers arrived at roughly the same time- the white farmers moving up from the south and the black farmers moving up from the north and meeting in the eighteenth century. The aim of this myth was to portray a perspective that both black and white were new to the area and thus had equal rights to the land. The discovery of sites such as Mapungubwe and Thulamela prove that African civilisations with extensive global connections were in existence by the 13th century,

long before the European era of exploration. Evidence from Iron Age sites clearly show that African farmers were living in South Africa at least a thousand years before the Europeans landed on South African soil.

This province is endowed with being termed the 'cradle of mankind' and has some of the earliest forms of art, mining, farming, trade and hunting. The discovery of artifacts at Mapungubwe stands in stark evidence of this fact.

The story of the Mapungubwe discovery goes like this.

After climbing a steep stone hill in the mountainous region of Mapungubwe, they found the remains of stone walls, iron tools and fragments of pottery.

The highly technological society was proven by the fragments of beaten gold, bangles and glass beads. The discovery of a golden rhinoceros clearly alluded to their knowledge of metal work.

Although this find is important to the ratification of a distorted history, you must remember that Mapungubwe is but one example of such a civilization in your province. The Limpopo province is full of historically significant sites. They would include: Machema, Lokwe, Magoro and Shenzhen and the Vuu ruins to name a few.

Thenzheni is a sacred forest of yet another site that awaits excavation to unlock the mysteries of the past.

Because of our sad history, Mapungubwe was kept out of the history books by the apartheid regime.

It was only after 1994 that the significance of Mapungubwe was truly realized.

In the spirit of this day we honour Mapungubwe as being a world heritage site.

In the spirit of freedom we now embrace, we cannot afford to rest on our laurels with the idea that it has been recorded in the history books. Many of these sites need further research as they have not yet been excavated.

It is our hope that the province will take the necessary steps to invest in the research and also in developing laws to protect these heritage sites in the province.

South Africa has a wealth of archaeological evidence, documented history and strong oral traditions. When these are woven together they could provide an interesting piece of history and a heritage of substance.

Thank you