

Chairperson of Council
Iziko Museums of South Africa
PO Box 61
Cape Town, 8000
Tel no: (021) 481 3832
Fax no: (021) 461 3994
E-mail address: chairperson@iziko.org.za

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To whom it may concern

Letter of Support to Save the Liesbeek Heritage

The Iziko Museums of SA supports the campaign to save and preserve the heritage aspects of the Two Rivers Urban Park (TRUP) precinct from unnecessary and unwarranted development. The TRUP is an environmentally sensitive and culturally significant heritage site which is layered with a rich history dating back to the pre-colonial period. The history of the Indigenous Khoekhoe people is interwoven with the tangible and intangible cultural heritage of the TRUP landscape.

Given the favourable environmental conditions, the indigenous Khoekhoe seasonally grazed the landscape with their huge herds of cattle. The latter attracted European mariners at the Cape and a relationship of trade were established. However, trade was on the basis of respect and fair conduct. However, in 1510, Francisco D'Almeida, the Portuguese Viceroy of India, overstepped the mark by sending some of his men on a mission to the Gorinhaiqua Kraal, situated at what is now known as Oude Moulén, to steal cattle and abducted the Khoena children. The Khoekhoe retaliated, killing D'Almeida and more than 50 of his men in what became known as the Battle of Gorinhaiqua. This should also be seen as the first wars of resistance at the Cape. Ironically more than 150 years later, this site once again becomes a site of major conflict between colonial forces and the local Khoi. Driven by mercantile capitalism and the expansion of the Dutch East India Company, Jan van Riebeeck arrived in the Cape in 1652 to set up a refreshment station. Having a different view of land ownership and occupation, he parcelled off land to be given to Free Burghers. This led to the first Khoen-Dutch wars of resistance from 1659 -1660, in defence of land and resources. Eventually the indigenous people would be completely stripped off their land, cattle, culture, language and resources and forced into servanthood and leaving their descendants displaced.

Given the above summarised version of historic events, it is evident that the TRUP is a significant cultural landscape which should be included in the resistance and liberation heritage of the country as the first site of resistance against colonial rule. Traditional heritage identification, management and preservation practices have excluded this rich cultural heritage in favour of the inclusion of the cultural heritage of European settlers in

the TRUP precinct. However, post-apartheid heritage legislation was enacted to ensure that heritage identification, management and preservation is inclusive and representative of the nation. In addition, the legislation sets out to redress and acknowledge past injustices. It is a well-known fact that indigenous communities had suffered great historic injustices at the hands of colonists who disposed their ancestral lands and resources, displaced them and their descendants, thus stripping them from their right to develop in “accordance with their needs and interest”.

“The preamble of the National Heritage Resources Act (Act 25 of 1999) states that “our heritage is unique and precious and it cannot be renewed. It helps us to define our cultural identity and therefore lies at the heart of our spiritual well-being and has the power to build our nation. It has the potential to affirm our diverse cultures, and in so doing shape our national character. Our heritage celebrates our achievements and contributes to redressing past inequities. It educates, it deepens our understanding of society and encourages us to empathise with the experience of others. It facilitates healing and material and symbolic restitution and it promotes new and previously neglected research into our rich oral traditions and customs.”

The above preamble reaffirms the importance of the preservation of both the tangible and intangible cultural heritage as a key contributor to healing and uniting the nation. In addition to the pre-colonial heritage, it is also significant to the colonial history of the country, thus interlinking both colonial and pre-colonial history and heritage, worthy of preservation for the benefit of current and future generations. The TRUP as a site of memory, holds particular significance to a section of the community whose history and heritage had previously been excluded, twisted, falsified and/or marginalised and who has strong historical, cultural and spiritual association with the site.

According to the NHRA, those heritage resources of South Africa which are of cultural significance or other special value for the present community and for future generations must be considered part of the national estate and fall within the sphere of operations of heritage resources authorities. The NHRA further states that the national estate may include:

- (a) Places, buildings, structures and equipment of cultural significance;
- (b) Places to which oral traditions are attached or which are associated with living heritage;
- (c) Historical settlements and townscapes;
- (d) Landscapes and natural features of cultural significance;
- (e) Geological sites of scientific or cultural importance;
- (f) Archaeological and palaeontological sites;
- (g) Graves and burial grounds, including—
 - (i) Ancestral graves;
 - (ii) Royal graves and graves of traditional leaders;
 - (iii) Graves of victims of conflict;
 - (iv) Graves of individuals designated by the Minister by notice in the Gazette;
 - (v) Historical graves and cemeteries; and
 - (vi) Other human remains which are not covered in terms of the Human Tissue Act, 1983 (Act No. 65 of 1983);
- (h) Sites of significance relating to the history of slavery in South Africa;

In addition, the NHRA states that a place or object is to be considered part of the national estate if it has cultural significance or other special value because of—

- (a) Its importance in the community, or pattern of South Africa's history;
- (b) Its possession of uncommon, rare or endangered aspects of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage;
- (c) Its potential to yield information that will contribute to an understanding of South Africa's natural or cultural heritage;
- (d) Its importance in demonstrating the principal characteristics of a particular class of South Africa's natural or cultural places or objects;
- (e) Its importance in exhibiting particular aesthetic characteristics valued by a community or cultural group;
- (f) Its importance in demonstrating a high degree of creative or technical achievement at a particular period;
- (g) Its strong or special association with a particular community or cultural group for social, cultural or spiritual reasons;
- (h) Its strong or special association with the life or work of a person, group or organisation of importance in the history of South Africa.

In terms of the above characteristics set out in the NHRA, the TRUP, due to its cultural, spiritual, and natural significance in reflecting the broad patterns of South African history as a place of conflict, contestation, displacement, should be declared a national heritage site.

The site holds contemporary significance to the first nation people and their future generations as a site of memory associated with their history, cultural beliefs, traditions and the restoration of their dignity. The site should be seen as a place of “victory, national pride, exceptional bravery and patriotism which defined the indigenous people more than five hundred years ago”. It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situation of indigenous peoples.

Any unnecessary and unwarranted development would lead to the re-victimisation of indigenous people and impose on their democratic right to dignity and spiritual well-being.

Sincerely



Advocate Rod Solomons
Chairperson of Council
Iziko Museums of South Africa