

Honourable Presiding Officers.

President Ramaphosa, Members of the Executive

The Chief Whip of the Majority Party,

Honourable Members of this House.

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a profound honour to address you today as we gather to celebrate Heritage Month. The occasion holds immense significance in the heart of our nation. As we reflect on 30 years of democracy, it is essential to acknowledge our diverse Heritage and continue to shape the rich heritage of our country.

We convey our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Former Minister Pravin Gordhan and the entire mass democratic movement; the name of Former Minister shall be embedded in the galaxy of Stars.

The month of September annually marks the Heritage Month in South Africa. This year, we will mark the start of Heritage Month under the theme, ***“CELEBRATING THE LIVES OF OUR FREEDOM HEROES AND HEROINES WHO LAID THEIR LIVES FOR OUR FREEDOM”***.

The theme was deliberately adopted to call to prompt the nation to reflect on the significance of celebrating 30 years of our freedom and acknowledge the sacrifices by our heroes and heroines. In identifying this year's theme, the Department considered the Preamble of the Constitution, which enjoins us *to recognise the injustices of our past and honours those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land; heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights.*

The Truth and Reconciliation (TRC) report which recommended that symbolic reparations as legal and moral obligations to survivors of gross human rights violations was necessary to 'restore human and civil dignity' and enable victims to come to terms with the past.

The repatriation also takes place in the context of the Resistance and Liberation Heritage Route (RLHR) Project which symbolizes the

restoration of identity and heritage and the reconnection with ancestral roots.

The RLHR is the South African National Chapter of the 'Roads to Independence: African Liberation Heritage Programme' (ALHP), following the resolution in 2005 at the 33rd General Conference of UNESCO, recognizing struggle heritage as being of universal value and significance (33 C/DR.29). The programme was adopted at the Sixteenth Ordinary Session of the African Union [Assembly/AU/Dec.357(XVI)] in 2011.

The South African Government has since been inundated with requests from families and communities for repatriation of the mortal remains of freedom fighters over the years. The well-known and publicized cases are those of Nat Nakasa in 2014, Moses Kotane and JB Marks in 2015 Until recently

Given the volume of the remains of South African liberation struggle fighters scattered across the globe, the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture **developed a National Policy for the Repatriation and Restitution of Human Remains and Heritage Objects** which was **approved by Cabinet in 2021.**

The Advisory Committee was appointed to advise on the implementation of the Policy and the Military Veterans endorsed the Country-to-Country Model and Implementation Plan for the Repatriation of Human Remains to Military Veterans.

Heritage is the soul of a nation. It connects us to our past, informs our present, and shapes our future. All South Africans of all races have been the custodians of culture, language, and tradition for generations,

We have nurtured the stories, songs, and rituals that define our diverse identities. Our traditions are alive in times of peace and strife, teaching us who we are and where we come from. These contributions are particularly significant in the context of South Africa's vibrant yet unrestrained history.

Our transition to democracy in 1994 marked the beginning of a new era not just politically, but also culturally. The task of redefining South Africa's

heritage in an inclusive and representative manner fell largely on the shoulders of each one of us.

Historians, curators, archivists, and cultural workers have played an instrumental role in preserving the stories of struggle and resistance that paved the way for our freedom. They have ensured that the narratives of marginalized communities especially for Black people are included in the records of our history.

Our Heritage is being safeguarded by practicing and transferring Indigenous knowledge systems, traditional crafts, and oral histories to future generations. The Heritage that we preserve is not only found in museums and books but also in the everyday lives of our people.

Campaigns to rename streets, monuments, and public spaces have pushed for the recognition of forgotten heroes and heroines, the restitution of cultural

The digital age offers new opportunities to document, share, and celebrate our diverse traditions, ensuring that our heritage thrives in modernity.

We must continue to invest in empowering our youth within the heritage sector ensuring equal representation in decision-making.

The centuries of both slavery and colonialism that were followed by the decades of apartheid has made black people in particular fight for their worth.

Racism, sexism and economic barriers often lead to exclusion and marginalization of certain groups from decision-making processes, limiting their ability to contribute to nation-building. Our history bears testimony to this,

Economic exclusion perpetuate inequality thus creating disparities in access to resources, opportunities, and services, undermining social cohesion and national unity.

Unaddressed racism, sexism, and economic disparities can lead to social unrest, protests, and conflict, destabilizing the nation.

Systemic injustices erode trust in institutions and nation-building process, making it challenging to build a cohesive society.

Continuing to deny the existence of racism, and refusing to confront it, will lead to a less vibrant, less cohesive, less prosperous society

The South African creative sector is a significant contributor to the economy, known broadly as the creative industries. These include areas such as fine art, music, film, television, literature, design, fashion, and multimedia.

The creative sector is a substantial source of employment, thus contributing to job creation. Our cultural export in a form of music genre such as Amapiano, has penetrated the international markets. This proves the cultural potential South Africa has. This diversity in our creative industries provides various opportunities for innovation and growth.

In conclusion, as we celebrate Heritage Month, let us honour the past and commit to a diverse cultural society. The stories, leadership, and resilience are the bedrock upon which we continue to build a more inclusive, proud, and united South Africa.

Let us continue to celebrate and elevate all the voices who have given so much of themselves to ensure that the fabric of our heritage remains strong, vibrant, and reflective of the true spirit of our nation.