**Proposed Repatriation Policy in Need of Funding**

The Department of Sport, Arts and Culture has assured the Portfolio Committee on Sports, Arts and Culture that when the National Policy on Repatriation and Restitution of Human Remains and Heritage Objects becomes law it will not be exclusive to politicians or those related to them. The department briefed the committee on the policy yesterday and indicated that it had worked hard to secure funding for the policy.

The policy will provide an all-encompassing, inclusive framework within which repatriation of human remains and restitution of heritage objects must take place. Where possible it will identify service providers in the exhumation process and clarify duties to ensure that service providers operate within the ambit of their particular mandates. It also aims to coordinate the activities and responsibilities of all service providers and provide for the establishment of Reparation and Restitution Program to coordinate the repatriation and restitution process.

It will also provide for the establishment of an Advisory Committee to provide strategic advice on cultural and management issues that affect all or many different communities and families, including the long-term care of ancestral remains and secret sacred objects with no identified community or family of origin. It will ensure that sound heritage principles are promoted, through various forms of memorialisation of exhumed mortal remains.

The policy will ensure that the dignity of human remains is preserved throughout the repatriation process, in line with international best practice guidelines, and ensure that communities and families involved are interacted with throughout the repatriation and restitution process. It also aims to facilitate healing and closure for the communities and families involved through appropriate handing over of the remains and any other assistance identified by the Repatriation and Restitution Programme.

The policy will ensure that the repatriation and restitution, including identification and actual exhumation, is conducted in accordance with international best practices and all the relevant legislation; and regulate expenditure in respect of repatriation and restitution process.

The Minister of the department, Nathi Mthethwa, said repatriation will be objective. “There won’t be any political considerations. It will be a comprehensive process and whether done outside or inside the country,” he emphasised. He cited the repatriation of iNkosi Dawy Stuurman and Sarah Baartman as example that all South Africans would benefit from the policy.

The department said the only challenges identified were situations where massive infrastructural developments had taken place on burial sites where South Africans lay.

The committee asked questions on the finer details of the policy and the funding. Committee member Mr Tsepo Mhlongo said the department needed to ensure that operational gaps are attended to. He wanted to know when the department will establish a fund for the policy. In response, the department told the committee that the budgeting process starts this month and that the department will go to the National Treasury to ask for funding.

The Chairperson of the committee, Ms Beauty Dlulane, said the committee needed frequent updates on how the policy was going.

The committee was also briefed on the distribution of the relief funds in the sector. It heard that a number of individuals and organisations had benefitted and that a report for the third phase will soon be prepared.

**Sibongile Maputi**
**28 July 2021**