NATIONAL ASSEMBLY

**QUESTION NO. 3932**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

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“Dr G A Grootboom (DA) to ask the Minister of Arts and Culture:

Whether any consultation process was followed before the decision to remove the KhoiSan Exhibition from display at the Planetarium in Cape Town was taken; if not, why not; if so, (a) who were the stakeholders consulted, (b) why were the stakeholders consulted and (c) what (i) was discussed and (ii) are the details of the decisions that were taken during these consultations?” NW4478E

**REPLY:**

The exhibition is more broadly titled the ‘Ethnographic exhibition’ and reflected not only on aspects of Khoisan but also on Nguni history and heritage. This exhibition, which was originally installed in 1970, has been a contentious one and has evoked much public debate over the years. The San Diorama that was part of the Ethnographic Gallery was closed to the public on 3 April 2001, according to the then CEO, Jack Lohman, “as part of the process to transform the Museum and to encourage consultative dialogue with Khoisan descendants, who found the diorama degrading. The Iziko Museums had discussed the decision to close the San Diorama at the National Khoisan Consultative Conference in Oudtshoorn, held from 29 March to 1 April 2001. The conference supported the decision and Mr Lawrence Lottering, Western Cape convener of the conference was quoted as saying that the display was “vulgar, its closure was long overdue, and “the Khoisan are shown as animals to Europeans and their children, who laugh at the depiction” (Iziko Museums of Cape Town Press Release 2 April 2001).

On 22 March 2016 the Iziko Museums held a ‘Re-imagining Workshop’ with stakeholders from various communities, museums and academic institutions to discuss ideas and proposals for ‘re-imagining the museum exhibitions and concepts, particularly in relation to the Ethnographic gallery at the Iziko South African Museum, the Iziko Slave Lodge Museum, the Iziko South African National Gallery and the ISAM’s Courtyard Project.

(a) Stakeholders at the ‘Re-imagining workshop included community representatives, academics from the University of Cape Town and the University of the Western Cape and museum practitioners from Iziko and other museums based in Cape Town as well as interested members of the public.

Several meetings were also held with the Khoi-Boesman - Nguni Coalition around issues of human remains as well as the future of the Ethnographic Gallery. On 7 August 2017 a Cleansing Ceremony was held in the Ethnographic Gallery with Kei Korana and Nguni Traditional Authority and was attended by community members, museum staff from Iziko and other museums as well as academics from UCT and UWC.

(b) The stakeholders were consulted to obtain their input into the future of the Ethnographic Gallery as well as of other sites of the Iziko museums and to check that the direction Iziko was taking was in line with the needs and wants of the communities it serves. The Khoi,-Boesman- Nguni Coalition was consulted because they had expressed an interest in meeting with Iziko to discuss exhibitions programmes and this provided an opportunity to obtain their views on the Ethnographic Gallery.

(c)(i) The relevance, impact and future of the Ethnographic Gallery and of the other sites were discussed as were various options for developing exhibitions that would impact on diverse communities and would speak to issues of social inclusion and nation building. The museum’s intention to replace the Ethnographic Gallery with a more appropriate exhibition was also discussed. Some of the participants in the workshop argued that there should be no displays on human history within a natural history setting as that encourages a particular view of the communities displayed.

The Khoi-Boesman- Nguni Coalition argued that there is no museum that focuses on Khoisan history and were not opposed to having new partnership exhibitions in that space.

(c)(ii) The stakeholders were strongly in support of the closure of the ‘Ethnographic Gallery’ and felt that it portrayed black people as ‘frozen in time’ and ‘othered’ them. The closure of the gallery was also regarded as being in line with the decolonizing of the museums. The Khoi-Boesman,-Nguni Coalition argued that it was important to have a cleansing ceremony in order to bring healing for the hurtful way in which Khoisan history and heritage had been portrayed.