**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**QUESTION NO. 3971-2015**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

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

With reference to the recent widespread destruction of our respective cultural heritages, (a) what has Government done thus far to protect our cultural heritages, with specific reference to the Botshabelo Mission in Fort Merensky near Middleburg in Mpumalanga and (b) what punitive measures are in place to deal with the defacing of statues in this regard?

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**REPLY:**

(a). On Friday, the 17 April 2015, I convened a National Consultative Meeting to deal with the challenges facing the transformation of the heritage sector with a focus on statues, place names and symbols that define our public spaces. Amongst the decisions of this meeting was the creation of a special purpose task team to assist with conceptualization, implementation and monitoring as well as impact assessment of a rapid process of transformation of the heritage landscape towards nation-building. The above-mentioned Task Team has been appointed and has conducted consultation workshops in all nine provinces.

Botshabelo Mission is a Provincial heritage site which was first protected on the 26th of February 1965. After successful land claim, the site was for some time managed with the assistance of the Steve Tshwete Local Municipality until it was completely transferred to the Botshabelo Community Development Trust which was appointed by the Botshabelo Community to run the affairs of the site as both a heritage site and a tourist attraction. The Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Arts and Culture established a Task Team that will put together a report and recommendations in terms of ensuring the salvaging of the site from total collapse.

This Task Team includes members of the Botshabelo Community, the Department and both Local and District Municipalities. The Task Team has since removed valuable artifacts from the site to a place of safety. The Task Team also recommended the services of a Conservation Architect to evaluate the state of structures/ buildings and the probable costs to repair. Furthermore, the Provincial Department of Arts and Culture has since 2008 assisted the Botshabelo Community Development Trust to solicit funding from the National Lottery. The funding was frozen amid disagreements and infighting among members of the Botshabelo Community.

The Department is now in the process of ensuring the establishment of a legitimate and stable board so that those funds can be released for the restoration and management of the site.

(b). In accordance with the National Heritage Resources Act, a person may be found guilty or liable to pay a fine or imprisonment for defacing a statue.