



STONE OF CONTENTION

The state of affairs at the Robben Island Museum has pitted stakeholder against stakeholder

ROBBEN ISLAND IS NOT FALLING APART

Having just commemorated Freedom Day last month and being now in Africa Month, and as we find ourselves in an election year, it is indeed a time for South Africans to reflect on the journey of their democracy, which is a mere 27 years old.

There has been much said in recent weeks about our beloved Robben Island Museum, by both friend and foe. I have watched political stakeholders, civil society and even the media conflate a number of issues currently faced by the museum's management and, by extension, the museum's council.

The most pressing, and certainly the area attracting the most attention, has been an independent investigation into mismanagement, and the findings and recommendations of the resultant report.

Is the matter in the public interest? Of course. Are we committed to transparency as well as clean and accountable governance? Absolutely. Does that mean that every conversation, allegation, tribulation and challenge has its origin in said report? I think not.

At this point, I wish to park the report momentarily and deal with the litany of conversations around the museum, the most recent of which has been the narrative that the memory, legacy and heritage of our liberation movement has been forsaken and betrayed by allowing the museum to fall into decay.

Just a few days ago, we facilitated two media

Contrary to the pointed narrative of disgruntled stakeholders, the heritage site is thriving, asserts **Khensani Maluleke**

visits with national media houses that had requested to see the state of the island first-hand. On both occasions, the journalists were pleasantly surprised by the functional state of the museum.

They also interviewed numerous visitors, both local and domestic, who expressed the sentiment that visiting the facility was a beautiful experience that touched visitors from the senses to the soul.

Still, the narrative that this World Heritage Site has allowed to degenerate, completely desecrating the sacrifices of our freedom fighters, continues to be driven by a small cohort of disgruntled stakeholders.

So who exactly are the villains accused of such atrocities? Is it the sport, arts, culture and recreation department, which has been mandated to protect and promote our heritage? Is it perhaps the public works and infrastructure department, which owns the assets and is mandated to uphold maintenance? Is it the Robben Island Museum executives, who have been accused by the DA of having given themselves salary increases to

the tune of 250% when the past four annual reports show salary increases of 7% (2017), 6.5% (2018), 0% (2019) and 0% (2020)?

The truth is that the allegations of an island in ruins are a populist narrative perpetuated by an individual or individuals with an ulterior agenda, peddling outrageous hyperbole to anyone who cares to listen.

I have said before that, through a process of cooperative governance, we remain committed to preserving one of South Africa's most iconic landmarks of the fight for freedom, a fight that continues today.

Because the Robben Island Museum is an entity of the sport, arts, culture and recreation department, its management has always worked closely with the public works and infrastructure department to ensure that facilities management continues on the island.

The economic onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic has adversely affected our ability to implement all the maintenance plans on target. With nearly no revenue for the past 13 months, certain projects have had to take priority over others.

The bottom line is that the island is not falling apart. Outdoor relics that date back to before World War 2 will certainly show signs of weathering. There is a fine line between protective maintenance and the preservation of natural aesthetics.

Regarding the report into allegations of mismanagement - the one report that seems to underpin everything else on the island, from the weather to the tides and everything between - there is no intention, nor has there ever been, to keep this report hidden from the public.

From the outset, we have communicated on the process as it has unfolded. Now in the final stages of the implementation of the recommendations, we are acutely aware of the potential disciplinary and legal implications for the affected parties, and it would be reckless to sabotage such processes by prematurely disclosing the content.

It has always been our intention to make the report public on conclusion of all processes.

That being said, as we celebrate Africa Month, in particular Africa Day on May 25, there is no better time to visit the Robben Island Museum. In the spirit of making the island more accessible to our people, we have implemented various group discounts - from 10% to 25% - to encourage families, youth groups and other civil society formations to come together and pay tribute to a piece of heritage that indeed belongs to Africa and all her children. A luta continua!

Maluleke is the Robben Island Museum council chairperson