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HANKEY:

New hope for long-delayed Sarah Baartman Centre

MORE than a decade after construction first began, the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance in Hankey has been formally handed over to a new contractor in a ceremony led by Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Dean Macpherson, who warned that government would not allow the mistakes that stalled the project for years to be repeated.

According to a Kouga Municipality statement, the ceremonial handover took place on 4 July.

The statement stated that the project, which has faced construction delays for more than a decade, is intended to honour the legacy of Sarah Baartman while preserving the history and heritage of Khoi and San communities.

Macpherson was joined by Prof Raymond Nkado (Deputy Chairperson of the Independent Development Trust Board); Council-

lor Lorraine Maree (Speaker of the Kouga Municipal Council); Cynthia August (Ward 9 Councillor); Kouga Local Municipality councillors; Chief Edmund Stuurman (Khoi leader) and members of the Khoisan community.

Speaking at the handover, Macpherson acknowledged that the incomplete Centre had become a symbol of delay and had failed to give Sarah Baartman's legacy the dignity and recognition it deserved.

He said when he assumed office two years ago, the Sarah Baartman Centre was among several stalled infrastructure projects inherited by his department.

"The Department could not continue as a graveyard of unfinished projects," said Macpherson.

He said the centre had been identified as one of the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure's top ten failed priority projects requiring urgent intervention.

According to Macpherson, government subsequently introduced focused oversight mechanisms, appointed the Independent Development Trust as the implementing agent, and strengthened procurement, planning and community engagement processes before appointing a new contractor.

"The handover to the newly appointed contractor is the result of that work," said Macpherson.

"It is not the end of the journey. It is not yet a victory lap. But it is a real and important turning point."

According to the municipality, the centre is envisioned as a place of remembrance, learning and cultural preservation, while also creating opportunities for tourism, local economic development and community pride.

The municipality further said Sarah Baartman's remains were repatriated from France and reburied in Hankey in 2002, following years of campaigning to restore her dignity and ensure that her story is told from a South African perspective.

Maree said the municipality welcomed the renewed commitment to completing the project.

"The Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance holds deep cultural, historical and emotional significance for the people of Hankey, Kouga and the broader Eastern Cape. Its completion will provide a fitting



The construction of the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance in Hankey was launched in 2014.



Minister of Public Works and Infrastructure Dean Macpherson at the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance in Hankey. PHOTOS: FACEBOOK

space to honour Sarah Baartman's life and legacy, while contributing to heritage tourism and local development," said Maree.

Macpherson said the newly appointed contractor had been tasked not only with completing the infrastructure, but also with restoring public confidence after years of delays.

"This is not an ordinary project. You are not simply here to complete a building. You are here to help repair a breach of trust," said Macpherson.

He warned that government would closely monitor implementation and would not allow the project to fall victim to the problems

that had delayed it for years.

"We will not allow the mistakes of the past to be repeated. We will not allow late payment, poor contract management, weak oversight, community exclusion, or poor performance to drag this project back into failure," said Macpherson.

The completed Centre is expected to create opportunities for local workers and businesses, while supporting tourism, education and economic growth in the region.

Macpherson said he aims to return to Hankey by the end of 2027 to formally hand the completed facility over to the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture.

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