

**Deputy Minister of Public Works
Ms BM Nzimande
8 April 2000**

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Signing ceremony of the Schmidtsdrift Land Claim Settlement Agreement

Today is yet another milestone in the democratisation of our country, in turning the dire effects of a previous Apartheid dispensation around to ensure equal opportunity and dignity to previously disadvantaged communities.

On behalf of my Minister, Ms Stella Sigcau, myself and the rest of the country, I share in your joy on signing this agreement.

In 1968 members of the Tswana and Fonteintjie communities were forcibly removed and later formerly dispossed of their rights in land - loosing what was dear to them. This land was known as Baviaanskrantz, Boomplaats, Schmidtsdrift, Plaatsdrift and Sivonel locations, in extent altogether some 28 000 ha.

The national Department of Public Works became the custodian of these properties, and allocated it to the SANDF, who utilised it as Schmidtsdrift Military Training Area.

After the new dispensation in 1994, specifically in terms of the Restitution of Land Rights Act (Act 22 of 1994), the Schmidtsdrift Tswana and Fonteintjie communities lodged a restitution claim in respect of respective portions of the Schmidtsdrift training area of which they have been dispossed.

Constructive negotiations, through the Commission on the Restitution of Land Rights and all stakeholders at national, provincial and local level, led to the agreement being reached in terms of Section 42D of Act 22 of 1994. This agreement restores full ownership of the land to the claimant Tswana and Fonteintjie communities, subject to certain conditions.

As nominal owner of the land involved in this claim, the Department of Public Works succeeded in a complex facilitation on resolving the authentic needs of the SANDF and legitimate rights and expectations of the communities.

The nature of the Department of Public Works' ownership of the land was such that it could not by itself decide on any course of action without all-round consensus. To all the parties concerned, I wish to express our appreciation for the constructive engagement and patience during the negotiations.

It is therefore with a sense of achievement that we can today, after years of negotiation, sign this historic agreement and further the restoration of the land to its rightful owners.

Due processes will now follow, to enable the legal transfer and registration of the land in the name of the respective communities. The State Property Holdings and Asset Management component of the Department of Public Works should be congratulated, together with their counterparts at other public institutions, for the progress thus far.

It is important for us to celebrate achievements such as this one, for they bear testimony to the fact that the Constitution of our country is alive and is working. It is another building block of the monument of freedom that we are constructing.

I trust that the transfer of the land in question will form an essential cornerstone in the reconstruction of the affected communities and the creation of greater stability and dignity. Community development should be the essence of their life in future.

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