



04 July 2026

SPEECH

MINISTER MACPHERSON KEEPS PROMISE TO APPOINT NEW CONTRACTOR FOR SARAH BAARTMAN CENTRE AFTER MORE THAN A DECADE OF DELAYS

(Note to editors: The following address was delivered by the Minister of Public Works & Infrastructure, Dean Macpherson, MP, during the ceremonial handover of the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance site to the newly appointed contractor in Hankey, Eastern Cape, on Saturday morning, 4 July 2026. He was joined by the Deputy Chairperson of the Independent Development Trust Board, Prof Raymond Nkado; Acting IDT CEO, Mr Sfiso Nsibande; the Speaker of the Kouga Municipal Council, Cllr Lorraine Maree; Ward 9 Councillor, Cllr Cynthia August; and Khoi leader, Chief Edmund Stuurman.)

- Public Works & Infrastructure Minister Dean Macpherson has formally handed over the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance site to a newly appointed contractor, delivering on his commitment to turn around the project after more than a decade of delays.
- The Minister said the unfinished Centre had become a source of shame, failing to honour the painful history and enduring legacy of Sarah Baartman with the dignity and respect she deserves.
- Minister Macpherson said the appointment of the new contractor marks a decisive step towards moving the project from delay to delivery, adding that he looks forward to returning to the Centre at the end of 2027 to formally hand it over to the Department of Sport, Arts and Culture.

It is a privilege to stand here today in Hankey, at a place that carries a weight far greater than the bricks, concrete, roads and structures around us.

This is not simply a construction site.

It is not simply another public works project.

It is a place that should speak to memory, to justice, to dignity, and to the obligation we have as a country to tell the truth about our past while building a better future.

We gather here in the name of Sarah Baartman.

A woman born in this region, near the Gamtoos River, whose life became one of the most painful symbols of colonial exploitation, racism, sexism and the denial of human dignity.

Sarah Baartman was taken from her home and displayed in Europe as an object of curiosity and entertainment.

She was stripped of her humanity in life, and even after her death in Paris in 1815, her body was subjected to further indignity.



For generations, her story stood as a reminder of what happens when people are denied their personhood, their culture, their identity, and their dignity.

But Sarah Baartman's story is also a story of return.

After many years of struggle, her remains were finally brought back to South Africa and laid to rest here in Hankey in 2002.

That return was meant to be an act of restoration.

It was meant to say that, as a democratic South Africa, we would no longer allow Sarah Baartman to be remembered through the eyes of those who exploited her, but through the dignity of the people and the land from which she came.

That is why this Centre of Remembrance matters.

It was meant to be a place where her life could be honoured properly.

It was meant to be a place where the history, culture and heritage of Khoi and San communities could be preserved and shared with future generations.

It was meant to be a place of learning, reflection, tourism, economic opportunity and community pride.

But, for more than a decade, this Centre became something else.

Instead of standing as a monument to dignity, it became a monument to delay.

Instead of being a place of remembrance, it became a reminder of government failure.

Instead of honouring the memory of Sarah Baartman, the unfinished state of this project became yet another shame attached to her name.

That is a painful thing to say, but it must be said.

Because we cannot build a better country by pretending that failure did not happen.

We cannot restore dignity by avoiding accountability.

And we cannot honour Sarah Baartman while allowing a Centre built in her memory to remain incomplete year after year, contractor after contractor, promise after promise.

For too long, communities were told that completion was around the corner.

For too long, money was spent without the result that the people of Hankey, the people of the Eastern Cape, and the people of South Africa deserved.

For too long, this site stood as proof of what happens when public infrastructure is not managed with urgency, discipline and care.

When I was appointed Minister of Public Works & Infrastructure two years ago, one of the first things that became clear to me was that the Department could not continue as a graveyard of unfinished projects.

Across the country, there were too many sites where communities had been promised schools, police stations, courts, memorials and public facilities, only to be left with incomplete structures and broken trust.

The Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance was one of the clearest examples of that failure.

It was unacceptable then, and it remains unacceptable now, that a project carrying this level of historical significance could be allowed to drift for more than a decade.

That is why, when the Department and the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture presented a report on this project in 2024, I rejected it.

I rejected it because it did not reflect the urgency required.

I rejected it because it did not provide the credible pathway to completion that this project demanded.

And I rejected it because Sarah Baartman's memory deserved more than excuses.

At the time, I said that this simply had to end.

Today, we are here because that work to end it has begun to produce results.

Over the past two years, we have worked to change the way the Department responds to failed and delayed projects.

We identified this Centre as one of the Department's Top 10 failed priority projects requiring urgent intervention.

We established focused mechanisms to ensure that stalled projects receive direct oversight.

We brought in the Independent Development Trust as the implementing agent to help drive the completion of this project.

We insisted on better planning, stronger procurement, improved oversight, proper community engagement, and a realistic path to delivery.

Today's handover to the newly appointed contractor is the result of that work.

It is not the end of the journey.

It is not yet a victory lap.

But it is a real and important turning point.

For the first time in too long, we can say that this project is no longer trapped only in reports, meetings and explanations.

It is now moving back into implementation.

The contract has been signed.

The required processes have been followed.

The site has been prepared for the next phase.

A capable contractor has been appointed.



And the work to complete the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance can now proceed with the seriousness it should always have received.

To the contractor, I want to be very clear.

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.

You are here to help complete a promise made to a community, to a province, to Khoi and San communities, and to the memory of Sarah Baartman herself.

Every wall completed here, every road upgraded, every classroom, workshop, reception area, public space and facility brought to life must be understood in that spirit.

This project must be completed with quality.

It must be completed with urgency.

It must be completed transparently.

And it must be completed with respect for the community and the historical importance of this site.

As the Department, we will support you where support is required.

But we will also hold you accountable.

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.

The people of Hankey have waited long enough.

The country has waited long enough.

And Sarah Baartman's memory has waited long enough.

I also want to speak directly to the community.

This project must benefit you.

It must create opportunities for local workers, for local enterprises, for young people, and for those who have waited many years to see this Centre completed.

But that participation must happen through lawful, transparent and fair processes.

The lessons from the past are clear: no project can succeed without the support and involvement of the community.

That is why social facilitation is so important.

That is why local leaders, traditional leaders, ward representatives, the municipality, the IDT, the Department and the contractor must work together.

This Centre must not become a site of conflict.

It must become a site of cooperation.

It must not become a place where development is blocked.

It must become a place where development is shared.

And it must not become another example of government and communities speaking past each other.

It must become an example of what is possible when everyone works together around a shared purpose.

To the Independent Development Trust, thank you for the work that has been done to bring the project to this point.

The responsibility now is to maintain momentum.

The IDT has a critical role to play in ensuring that the project is managed properly, that risks are identified early, that the contractor is monitored closely, and that the Department is kept fully informed at every stage.

To the officials in the Department of Public Works & Infrastructure, especially those in Construction Project Management and the Eastern Cape regional team, thank you for your work.

But let me also say this: this project must remain a test of whether the reforms we are driving in the Department are real.

The public will not judge us by our statements.

They will judge us by what is completed.

They will not judge us by our intentions.

They will judge us by delivery.

And they will not judge us by today's ceremony alone.

They will judge us by whether this Centre is completed and whether it serves the people for whom it was intended.

That is the standard we must hold ourselves to.

To the Department of Sports, Arts and Culture, which is the client department and funder of this project, we value the partnership required to bring this work to completion.

This project can only succeed if every part of the state involved in it understands the urgency of the moment.

The time for working in silos is over.

The time for passing responsibility from one institution to another is over.

The only thing that matters now is delivery.



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To the Kouga Local Municipality, the Sarah Baartman District Municipality, and all local leaders present here, thank you for your role in bringing us to this point.

Your support will remain essential in the months ahead.

This Centre will not stand in isolation from the community around it.

It must connect to local tourism, local heritage, local economic development, local education, and local pride.

When completed, it must not simply be a building people visit once.

It must become part of the life of this area.

It must become a place where learners come to understand the past.

Where visitors come to understand the history of Sarah Baartman and the heritage of Khoi and San communities.

Where local people see not only a memorial, but an asset that contributes to opportunity.

Where dignity is not only spoken about, but made visible.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we ceremonially hand over this site to the newly appointed contractor.

But in truth, the handover we need is bigger than that.

It is a handover from delay to delivery.

From neglect to accountability.

From shame to dignity.

From broken promises to a renewed commitment.

We cannot undo the suffering Sarah Baartman endured.

We cannot undo the many years during which this Centre stood incomplete.

But we can decide what happens next.

We can decide that this project will no longer be defined by failure.

We can decide that this site will no longer be spoken about only as an example of delay.

We can decide that the memory of Sarah Baartman will finally be honoured in the way it should have been honoured from the beginning.

And we can decide that the Department of Public Works & Infrastructure will no longer accept unfinished projects as normal.

Since my appointment, I have said that we must turn South Africa into a construction site.

That does not only mean building new infrastructure.

It also means finishing what has been left behind.



It means going back to the places where communities were failed.

It means confronting the difficult projects.

It means accepting responsibility where government has fallen short.

And it means proving that the state can still deliver with discipline, urgency and pride.

This Centre must become one of those proofs.

So today, I am grateful.

Grateful that, after years of unacceptable delay, a contractor has finally been appointed.

Grateful that the project is moving again.

Grateful to every official, every partner, every local leader and every community member who has helped bring us to this point.

But I am also determined.

Determined that we will not be back here in future to explain another delay.

Determined that this contractor will be held to the highest standard.

Determined that this project will be completed.

And determined that the Sarah Baartman Centre of Remembrance will finally become what it was always meant to be: a place of dignity, memory, learning and opportunity.

May the work that begins here now be worthy of the name it carries.

May it honour Sarah Baartman.

May it honour the Khoi and San communities whose history it must preserve.

May it honour the people of Hankey and the Eastern Cape.

And may it remind all of us in public office that remembrance without delivery is not enough.

We must build.

We must complete.

And we must do so with dignity.

Thank you.

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