

**Minister of Public Works
Ms Stella Sigcau
21 September 1999**

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**Opening Address at the Seminar:
"Management Of Heritage Sites"
Old Synagogue, Paul Kruger Street, Pretoria**

Master of Ceremonies,
Honoured and expert speaking contributors,
Delegates,
Distinguished guests,
Media representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen -

Thank you for the warm welcome.

It is an honour and with great pleasure that I shall open this seminar today. We all need to acknowledge our history - and not be like a person without a memory. I also believe that the expression of South Africa's history through monuments, museums, plaques, trails, works of art and other forms to commemorate what is meaningful to all South Africans has the potential to contribute to further reconciliation and nation building.

Heritage assets in the built environment are an integral part of a nation or community and its reference. These assets are tangible evidence of the community's history, growth and development, its culture and achievements.

It has been said that the "family silver" of South Africa's built heritage forms part of the Department of Public Work's assets. The Union Buildings, and the Palace of Justice in Pretoria, The Castle in, and Robben Island near Cape Town are but a few of these high profile assets. Less well known but of equal importance are the vast number of public buildings scattered all over the country.

One of the first buildings in a town or settlement often was some form of public office, like the police station, the magistrate's office or the local jail. These differ in stature, and are often simple vernacular structures, reflecting the materials, craftsmanship, needs and circumstances of the time and the area, and can be appreciated in that context.

The Department of Public Works estimates that approximately 15% of the fixed assets captured on the National Asset Register have heritage value. This means that these are structures or sites either declared as national monuments, listed on the register of conservation worthy property with the National Monuments Council or older than 60 years.

In the past, no particular distinction was made between these buildings and any other structure belonging to the Department, and irreparable damage was done by indiscriminate demolishing, unsympathetic alterations, unnecessary replacement of original material, etc.

In the restructuring of the Department during the Transformation Process the specific challenges and responsibilities of the custodianship of these heritage assets were recognised in the creation of the Sub-Directorate: Heritage Assets Management in October 1996. The function of this sub-directorate is mainly to create a responsible management framework for heritage assets, referring to international accepted standards, but within the local context. Policy, advice, registers and operations should be kept up-to-date, adhering to the applicable legislation and working together with bodies such as the National Monuments Council and the Castle Control Board. It is important that recommendations to clients and project managers are well informed in respect of possible use, addition, restoration, demolition or disposal of heritage assets.

The prime objective of the Department of Public Works is to meet the accommodation needs of its Client Departments. At this stage it is directed mainly towards the departments of Correctional Services, Police, Justice, Finance, the Defence Force, Foreign Affairs, Water Affairs, Arts, Culture, Science and Technology on a national level. Regional and local governments also have a large number of heritage assets, but this falls outside the scope of this Department.

The challenge for the Department is to manage its heritage assets within the realities of the day. It is a given that facilities need to be constantly upgraded to meet the changing needs and standards of the client

department, and of modern society. Technological- and safety and security requirements and standards need to be incorporated into the existing structures.

At the same time, with constraints on financial and skills resources, the importance of appropriate heritage management within the broader property portfolio management of the State is imperative. Our government is convinced that infrastructure delivery, building and construction, including maintenance and restoration as specialised fields, are key areas of job creation and skills transfer to previously marginalised individuals and emerging contractors.

But let me also boast: In our restoration projects we have achieved remarkable success in realising opportunities for the transfer and development of specialist skills. At the Palace of Justice, as I am sure our project manager, Susan Pyke, will show you on the visit there, in particular tiling, plastering and carpentry are some of the areas that have lent itself to artistic development and expression by members of the construction team who have excelled beyond expectation.

The prime objective in heritage management is to keep the buildings functionally occupied, preferably for the purpose they were originally designed for, but it is also often necessary to find an alternative use, and to do the necessary to adapt the building for this new occupation.

A conservation approach of "prevention is better than cure", is sadly not always possible, as many buildings such as the Synagogue we are now in, that was designed and crafted by our predecessors for a specific purpose, are now in a state of deterioration, and without an alternative use to our clients.

We do realise that heritage buildings continuously need maintenance or restoration of invariable complexity. There is a tendency for estimates to increase, even after initial careful inspection and subsequent scope of works. Quite often latent defects are only exposed after commencement of projects, impacting on the overall cost. To find the best possible solution provides excellent opportunities for creative problem solving from sensitive consultant teams, and it is certainly possible within the parameters of responsible heritage asset management.

We believe that in heritage management the needs of the client must be defined, not only in terms of quality and cost, but also in terms of the social and economic aspirations of the beneficiaries and participants in the maintenance or restoration process.

An important contribution of the Heritage component lies in the direct assistance to the Director-General of Public Works in his capacity as a member of the Legacy Committee. This committee is attending to projects aimed at reviving the much neglected, marginalised and distorted South African heritage by identifying historical sites, individuals and events which have contributed to the history of the country and are worthy of commemoration.

Thirty legacy projects have been earmarked for quick delivery, examples of which are a Freedom Park memorial to those who fell during the Liberation Struggle and a Women's Monument to commemorate the historic march by women to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956, demonstrating against carrying passes. The Department has already contributed in the delivery of the Samora Machel Memorial and the Bloodriver/Ncome museum. These historical sites will also be potential venues for celebrations, anniversaries of the Struggle and cultural festivals.

In terms of the way forward, I believe that this seminar will greatly contribute in informing various aspects of the work, including the Legacy Projects.

I trust that your deliberations over these three days will constitute committed involvement from departmental officials, heritage organisations and professionals in the management of heritage sites so that in future the emphasis will be to encourage the continuing and lively use of heritage places and ensuring that our unique and beautiful heritage environment is protected for the enjoyment and sustenance of future generations.

I will conclude by thanking the staff who organised this seminar at appropriate timing, and all the participants for their contribution and participation - in particular our speakers from abroad and those from the private sector who are sharing in our endeavours to conserve and further build on our heritage in this country.

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