



**MINISTRY OF SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

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**Media Statement
Attention: All Media, Editors and Journalists
Monday, 9 June 2025**

**STATEMENT ON THE RETURN OF KHOI AND SAN ANCESTRAL HUMAN
REMAINS AND THE REPATRIATION OF THOSE WHO DIED IN EXILE**

The Department of Sport, Arts and Culture (DSAC), in close partnership with the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development (DoJ&CD), the Department of Defence and Military Veterans (DMV) is proud to announce two pivotal initiatives: the Exile Repatriation Project and the Reburial of Khoi and San Ancestral Human Remains.

Building on these efforts, the post-1994 democratic government has made it a priority to restore dignity to those who were dehumanised by colonial and apartheid-era practices, particularly the unethical removal and exploitation of ancestral remains. While important strides have been made in addressing this painful history, significant work remains. In 2021, Cabinet approved a National Policy for the Repatriation and Restitution of Human Remains and Heritage Objects, which created a structured framework for coordinated, country-to-country repatriation and set the foundation for a more inclusive and state-led redress process.

The policy was designed to replace the unsustainable model of ad hoc repatriations led by individual families or municipalities. Instead, it provides a cost-effective and inclusive path forward that seeks not only to return remains with dignity but also to facilitate national healing and remembrance. Guided by the Preamble of our Constitution and the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on symbolic reparations, the policy aims to honour those who suffered for justice and freedom, heal the divisions of the past, and contribute to the broader goals of social cohesion and nation building.

These projects represent more than logistical undertakings. They are deeply spiritual and symbolic acts of rehumanisation, remembrance, and reconciliation. They reaffirm our government's firm commitment to dignity, cultural restoration, and the healing of historical wounds.



1. Reburial of Khoi and San Ancestral Human Remains

For far too long, the remains of South Africa's First Peoples, including the Khoi, San, and other indigenous groups, were taken without consent, commodified, and used to support racist ideologies. These ancestors were collected through grave robbing and illicit trade and were treated not as human beings but as specimens for exploitation. Their remains were kept in institutions across the country and abroad under colonial and apartheid rule for decades.

This marks the beginning of our efforts to correct these injustices

Through our implementing partners, namely Iziko Museums of South Africa and the South African Heritage Resources Agency's Repatriation and Restitution Office, we will lead the reburial of 58 ancestral remains that originate from the Northern Cape. This process is being carried out in full consultation with affected communities. It is guided by the Northern Cape Reburial Task Team, which represents the Nama, Griqua, Korana, and San communities.

This reburial is more than a physical act of returning remains to the soil. It is the restoration of dignity. It is the fulfilment of long-standing cultural and spiritual responsibilities. It is a moment of healing for communities that have suffered centuries of erasure and displacement.

In addition, we are engaged in active discussions with the Hunterian Museum at the University of Glasgow regarding the return of more Khoi and San ancestral remains. We call on other institutions, both local and international, to commit to genuine and action-oriented processes of restitution and repatriation.

2. The Exile Repatriation Project

The second initiative, the Exile Repatriation Project, serves as a powerful reminder of the high cost paid by those who fought for our freedom. Thousands of South Africans went into exile during the liberation struggle. Many never returned. They passed away on foreign soil, often unidentified and buried in unmarked or forgotten graves. Families were left with unanswered questions and without the opportunity to properly mourn their loved ones.

This national initiative, carried out in collaboration with the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, the Department of Defence and Military Veterans and the South African Heritage Resources Agency, seeks to locate, identify, and repatriate these fallen freedom fighters. It is a solemn responsibility of our democratic state to honour these individuals and ensure that they are returned to their families and communities with the dignity they deserve.



A joint delegation will soon embark on a technical mission to Angola, Lesotho, Zambia, and Zimbabwe. This mission will include cemetery record inspections, grave mapping, and historical research aimed at locating the final resting places of our compatriots who died in exile.

We urge all former exiles, comrades, family members, and friends to come forward with any information that could assist this important process. This includes names, dates, photographs, locations, or any other relevant details. An online form is available for public submissions at: www.sahra.org.za/exile-repatriation / <https://www.dsac.gov.za/exile-repatriation> / <https://www.nhc.org.za/liberation-heritage>.

Minister Gayton McKenzie together with Deputy Minister Peace Mabe, in collaboration with the Department of Defence and Military Veterans and the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development, hosted a press briefing on Monday, 9 June 2025, at 10:00 at the Government Communication and Information System (GCIS) offices in Hatfield, Pretoria. The briefing provided an update on two significant national initiatives focused on remembrance, restorative justice, and the dignified return of South African ancestors and liberation heroes.

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