

## Robben Island Museum addresses EPPA concerns



*[Caption: RIM addresses EPPA concerns, from left RIM CEO Mava Dada, RIM Council Chairman Sibusiso Buthelezi and Chief Heritage Officer Pascall Taruvinga]*

1. On the 29th of November 2018, the Ex-Political Prisoners Association (“EPPA”) released a press statement and hosted a press briefing to raise their concerns about Robben Island Museum’s (“RIM”) Management.
2. I am responding to the EPPA statement and articulations at their media briefing on behalf of RIM, in my capacity as the Chairperson of the RIM Council which is the governance structure of the organisation. I wish to state upfront, that 2018 marks the 100 years celebration of Nelson Mandela and Albertina Sisulu and it is surprising that the EPPA seeks to divert attention from the role these individuals have played as acknowledged nationally and internationally.
3. Further, I wish to state, at the onset, that RIM has not received any official communication from the EPPA regarding the questions they purport to have posed to the CEO of RIM. It is therefore misleading to tell the media that RIM did not respond to the issues raised by the EPPA. It is also not in the interest of RIM to address such matters raised by our stakeholders in the media. In this context we invite the EPPA to engage with RIM as we have been doing since inception and since RIM was declared as a Museum and a World Heritage site.

4. Nevertheless, RIM has decided to respond to the unfounded public articulations of the EPPA in a manner which seeks primarily, to clarify the status of RIM and the relations RIM has with its stakeholders. In its media statement and press conference, the EPPA inter alia,
  - (a) distorts the way RIM is managed and governed,
  - (b) omits to explain the context which led to their press statement and media briefing; and
  - (c) misrepresents the role of the EPPA as envisaged by the organisation's founding member, our late former President Nelson Rholihlahla Mandela, as well as the role of other ex-political prisoners.

However, RIM shall avoid any temptation to engage on these matters in the media, and emphasises openness to engage with the EPPA or any other stakeholder in the platforms RIM has created.

## MANAGEMENT AND GOVERNANCE OF RIM

5. RIM is a public entity established in terms of the Cultural Institutions Act in 1997 and is governed by the Public Finance Management Act ("PFMA") of 1999 and all other legislation and regulations governing the management of public finances.
6. In 1999, RIM was also declared a World Heritage Site, with its inscription inspired by the Island being A Symbol of the Triumph of Human Spirit over Adversities. As a World Heritage site, RIM is also managed in terms of UNESCO statutes.
7. As a national and international heritage site, RIM is mandated to ensure that its operations and management of the Island are cognisant of all the layers of its history and that it does not inadvertently foreground one layer at the expense of another layer of the history. It should be noted that Robben Island is no longer a prison, but a Museum. We hope the EPPA in its efforts to raise public attention will not lead to breaking of the law.
8. Robben Island has a multi-layered history that dates back over 500 years and RIM is responsible for ensuring that all layers are reflected and communicated to all interested parties in the history of the Island. This means that RIM has several relationships with a wide number of stakeholders.
9. The Maximum Security Prison represents the cornerstone of the Robben Island Statement of Significance and therefore, I can confirm that the role of ex-political prisoners, who provide living heritage, are at the centre of this significance. However, the EPPA as an organisation, is but one of RIM's important stakeholders, as are the large number of ex-political prisoners who are not members of the EPPA. In addition, RIM has similar relationships with other stakeholders that interact with the other layers of the Island's history.

10. RIM's stakeholder relationship with the EPPA is based on this important principle. Other critical principles that inform RIM's stakeholder relationships are rooted in a commitment to good governance, transparency and accountability as imposed by the PFMA.
11. Our observance of these principles takes precedence over meeting specific requests and interests of individual stakeholder groups. The questions posed in the EPPA statement fall within this category. At best it touches on internal operational and management issues that is not the domain of stakeholder relationships and at worst they impinge on the good governance practices of RIM as required by the PFMA and the people of South Africa who are sick and tired of the mismanagement of public entities.
12. The sensationalism of the EPPA statement detracts from the broader achievements that RIM has achieved in building the Island as a symbol of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity through all the layers of its over 500-year history. It is precisely these achievements that have created a balance between those ex-political prisoners who served on the Island as opposed to other prisons in the country and other stakeholders of other layers of the history.
13. This balance means that all stakeholders have equal status and that no one stakeholder will have a more privileged relationship with RIM over others. For this, RIM remains unapologetic. We also continue to urge the EPPA and any other stakeholders that wish to engage with RIM to do so in a professional manner utilising the existing due processes and channels that are available.

## CONTEXT OF THE EPPA STATEMENT

14. RIM would like to state that EPPA had not submitted any list of the grievances to RIM two weeks ago as alleged in their Press Briefing of the 29th of November 2018.
15. In fact, two weeks ago Mr Mpho Masemola (purportedly on behalf of the EPPA) and his business associate, Mr Johan van Heerden, the operator of the "Madiba 1" ferry, met with the CEO of RIM who had responded to their request for a meeting.
16. Madiba 1 is one of the private ferries contracted to RIM to provide a service on a "charter" basis to augment RIM's capacity to transport visitors to the Island.
17. At the meeting, Mr Mpho Masemola and his business associate informed the CEO of RIM about their intention to import a boat from outside the country. With the current need for boats at RIM, Mr Masemola and his associate were advised to follow SCM processes for contracting charter ferries. We currently have an open tender that allows any service provider to participate in chartering of visitors to the Island.

18. After this meeting, the pair asked RIM to issue a letter of guarantee for their new boat. The guarantee requested required the CEO of RIM to commit to using the said new boat “Madiba 2” outside the current open procurement process (already underway) for procuring such services from any person with a boat that can assist with passenger ferrying.
19. Based on good management and governance practice and principles, the CEO indicated he would not be able to issue the requested letter of guarantee. Had the CEO issued the requested guarantee letter, he and RIM would have been in breach of procurement processes.
20. Mr Mpho Masemola indicated his unhappiness with the CEO’s refusal to offer such a letter of guarantee and threatened to take action, including but not limited to going public on the matter of RIM refusing to issue the guarantee letter.

## THE ROLE OF EPPA AND EX-POLITICAL PRISONERS

21. I concur, as clearly indicated in the EPPA statement, that the EPPA was established in 1997 to serve the interest of ALL ex-political prisoners and not just the ex-prisoners who served on Robben Island.
22. For the record, and in order to accommodate the ex-political prisoners that exist outside the realm of the EPPA, RIM has established:
  - (a) several Reference Groups that represent various moments in the political imprisonment timeline of Robben Island, and
  - (b) an Ex-Political Prisoners Advisory Committee (EPPAC) as a Consultative Forum of ex-political prisoners. The EPPAC was established in 2017 and is officially part of RIM’s governance structures as a Sub-Committee of its Heritage Committee.
23. In summary therefore, this means that:
  - RIM is but one of a wider range of stakeholders that the EPPA engages with; &
  - The EPPA is responsible for looking after the interests of all prisoners and not just the ex-political prisoners that served on the Island.
24. The less than 20 ex-political prisoners who are on the RIM’s payroll are treated as employees equal to all other employees. The relationship with employees is governed by the established labour relations regulatory framework. Employees of RIM cannot be service providers to RIM. The RIM Council has taken a conscious decision to create a platform for the ex-political prisoners who are employees of RIM to actively participate in the affairs of the EPPAC.
25. We are not at all obliged to engage with the EPPA media release in Public. Nevertheless, we want to use this opportunity to invite the EPPA and any of our stakeholders to engage with us and let us ensure the historic role of the

Robben Island Maximum Security Prison serves as a reminder of the atrocities of Apartheid and the Triumph of the Human Spirit against extreme Adversity. This has to be seen in the context of educating future generations about the role this fundamental spirit laid the foundation for democracy in South Africa. In so doing, we shall be acknowledging the role of those who were incarcerated there over centuries in shaping the South Africa of today. RIM shall carry this mandate without any intimidation or threats as the EPPA seems to suggest.

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