MEDIA RELEASE

Second Extension of “Investigation of Allegations Against the Management of Robben Island Museum” by Robben Island Museum Council

IMMEDIATE RELEASE

01 October 2020

On the 26th of June 2020, the Council of Robben Island Museum issued an update on the matter pertaining to the investigation currently underway that followed an initial forensic investigation initiated by the Minister of DSAC in 2018 into allegations against the Management of Robben Island Museum, made by EPPAC on 29th November 2018. DSAC, in turn approached the State Attorney which was finally responsible for the appointment of MacRobert Attorneys.

This communication provided context of the “Forensic Investigation Report into the Management of Robben Island Museum,” and the steps taken by RIM Council in prioritizing the investigation, resulting in the appointment of MacRobert Attorneys to assist Council in undertaking this investigating.

MacRobert Attorneys officially commenced the investigation on 26th June 2020 and it was anticipated that the investigation would conclude within a period of four (4) calendar weeks, however, in the light of other legal issues that arose during the course of the investigation, that needed to be cleared, this resulted in a delay in the completion of the investigation, resulting in Council approving a request by the investigating law firm, to extend the completion date to 30th September 2020.

At a special meeting of Council, and after consultation with the investigators on 29th September 2020, Council again approved a request by the Investigators for a further extension of (3) weeks, ending 21st October 2020, due to a number of further hurdles encountered, particularly in the gathering of some of the pertinent documentary and oral evidence to the investigation.

Further, on the same day, Council met with the Auditor-Generals office, at Councils request, seeking updates on the investigation by the Ethics and Risk Unit of the AG relating to irregular expenditure concerning the acquisition of the boat, the Krotoa, purchased by RIM during 2019, and to clarify which aspects Council should be able to, and have in fact decided to investigate, relating to the procurement of the Krotoa. This investigation will also be covered during the extended period of (3) weeks for the investigation.
This will also include the investigation of all other aspects that are not covered by the current investigation underway by the Competition Commission relating competitive bidding. This will ensure that all allegations of impropriety or irregularity, other than those currently under investigation by other State Organs are fully investigated by the RIM Council in order to determine appropriate action to be taken, following the outcome thereof.

The conclusion of this investigation and the appropriate action to be taken following the investigation will hopefully once and for all remove the hanging cloud on the reputation and image of RIM which is a national and world heritage to be preserved for prosperity for the nation and the world at large.

Impact of COVID-19 on the institution and the positive resumption of tours

The Council continues to be committed to serving diligently by prioritising pertinent matters in providing leadership and fulfilling its fiduciary duties as RIM’s governing body. To this end, Council earlier this year submitted RIM proposed five-year strategic plan for 2020 to 2025, as well as the Annual Performance Plan for 2020/21 in alignment with the ICMP of RIM for 2018 - 2023 to DSAC, within the prescribed deadlines.

Subsequent thereto, however, RIM was forced to suspend tour operations on 16th March 2020, as part of measures aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 which resulted in the immediate cessation of its own revenue generation for the entire first half of the financial year, accounting for approximately 65% of its total annual revenue base. This resulted in Council adopting new measures to redirect RIM's remaining resources towards the medium term sustainability of the organisation for the balance of the financial year 2020/21.

The lockdown has had a significantly negative impact on RIM’s finances as 65% of our income is generated through our tourism operations. Overall financial impact is that RIM is 100% below the anticipated revenue budget and also the visitor target.

Covid-19 has adversely impacted the current operations, with the result that RIM has not been able to operate tours since the end of March 2020. The result is that the entity is currently operating at a deficit since April. The entity is currently utilising reserves to cover shortfalls, however the entity will not be able to cover the shortfall indefinitely. Albeit with the resumption of tours on 14th September 2020, RIM will require some form of relief funding and we are working closely with the Department of Sport, Arts & Culture (DSAC), which in turn has been in consultation with National Treasury to obtain the necessary approvals for the diversion to enhance the short term sustainability of the entity until such time it is able to restore revenue generation levels previously experienced prior to the pandemic. However, it is important to note that all employees remained employed throughout the national lockdown period and received their full salaries and benefits as per their employment contracts.

Since reopening tours on 14th September 2020 (three tours per week), RIM has welcomed over 600 visitors. In comparison to full month of prior year – RIM’s revenue was R 11 038 170 vs R225 230 for September 2020.
RIM remains sensitive to the issues both from business, operational, and tourist customer perspectives and will ensure that the right balance is found to equally mitigate operational risk and maintain customer satisfaction; whilst prioritising the safety of staff and their livelihoods.

**The call for partnership and programme support from potential investors**

Robben Island Museum is tasked with telling the story of South African's collective past, contributing to conversations around social cohesion and unity, and educating future generations. As a National Cultural Institution and World Heritage site, RIM documents and presents diverse accounts of the past, bringing forth the voices of the silent, forgotten and marginalised. However, due to our limited research capacity and financial constraints, we are unable to upscale any of our current projects. As such, RIM is constantly seeking out new partnerships with corporates, funding agencies and institutions of higher learning in order to tap into their funding, research, conservation and capacity building programmes. Robben Island Museum currently runs three programmes that could greatly benefit from corporate sponsorship and support. These three projects are the Ex-Political Prisoners - Life History Project, Natural and Built Heritage Conservation, and Memorialisation Project.

**Ex Political Prisoners - Life History Project and Memorialisation Project**

As from March 2015, Robben Island Museum (RIM) has implemented its Strategic Research Agenda (SRA), with emphasis on the multiple and multi-layered values that define the Island as a cultural landscape. One area that has been prioritised, is the documentation of the life histories of Former Political Prisoners that were incarcerated on Robben Island in the Maximum Security Prison. The ailing health and fragile old age of a number of the Ex-Political Prisoners (EPPs) has exacerbated RIM’s need to document their stories and memories before they pass away. The main parameter of this project is to document the life histories and memories of significance from Ex-Political Prisoners (EPP’s). This project will ensure that their narratives and stories are never forgotten, future generations will be able to access these untold stories and learn about the history of South Africa and Robben Island.

**Memorialisation Project**

The Memorialisation Project is a living process that RIM has initiated in order to remember and honour different groups of people who lived on the Island. It particularly seeks to memorialise individuals who were brought and kept on the island against their will. Through a series of interactive exhibitions, stories and experiences on the island, this project is further meant to enhance the visitor’s interpretation of the site; while concurrently preserving these memories for future generations. Memorialisation is on-going taking on new meanings where stories come alive in the exhibitions, and become internalised and ritualised by our visitors. In order to complete this process RIM requires companies and individuals to come forward and sponsor new exhibitions, the creation of symbolic objects [sculptures, walls of honour], and educational material for students.

**Conservation of Natural and Built Environment**

Robben Island Museum has many competing and overlapping conservation needs that require careful mapping and management i.e. world heritage site, marine protected area, cultural landscape,
biodiversity species, and a major tourism destination. All these management areas are well captured in our Integrated Conservation Management Plan (ICMP 2018-2023). However, they require the involvement of external funders in order to adequately implement the large scale conservation and restoration of the built environment which is impacted by environmental factors such as the close proximity to the coastal environment and extreme weather.

The preservation of the natural environment, understanding the effects of climate change on the island and building resilience has also become central to our plans. RIM has been working on obtaining more sponsorships in order to acquire additional indigenous trees to plant on the island. The organisation seeks to replace all non-indigenous and invasive plant species on the island in the next few years. So, we would be delighted if we could get more corporates sponsoring projects that will ensure that we are able to conserve our built environment, develop a GIS system to map and manage the island, or the donation of appropriate plant material, including indigenous trees to be planted around the island. These actions will assist us in enhancing our conservation efforts and status as a World Heritage Site, Marine Protected Area and an important part of the National Estate.

Potential investors are invited to contact Robben Island Museum directly – Mr Thabo Seshoka (Senior Manager: Heritage & Research) on thebos@robben-island.org.za for more information on our various programmes requiring support.

In conclusion, RIM Council would like to thank the management and staff of Robben Island for their unwavering support and dedication in fulfilling RIM’s five-year strategic plan for 2020 to 2025, as well as the Annual Performance Plan for 2020/21, in alignment with the ICMP of RIM for 2018 – 2023.

The Council continues to commit itself to diligently serving the institution by prioritising pertinent matters in providing leadership and fulfilling its fiduciary duties as RIM’s governing body. RIM will continue to serve as a beacon of hope to the nation as a whole and to the world at large, as a symbol of triumph of the human spirit over adversity as stated in its vision.

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All media enquiries related to the report may be forwarded to: Robben Island Museum Council Chairperson:

Advocate Michael Masutha
Email: mikenasutha24@gmail.com
Mobile: 082 496 8837