

PRESENTATION AT THE 4TH AFRICAN CONGRESS ON
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ON
HEALING THE WOUNDS OF CONFLICT
BY
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There is an **old saying** that goes “time heals all wounds” – unfortunately it **is not always that simple**, especially since the wounds of conflict are not necessarily physical by nature. Frequently the other **types of wounds** caused - like those to human dignity, self-esteem, access to resources and deprivation – have a much more lasting effect and in themselves hold the seeds for further future conflict.

It is generally known that **South Africa** has had a, at times, **glorious but mostly very difficult past**. Some of the more recent periods of conflict are still fresh in the minds, because they relate to what has gripped the imagination and solicited the active opposition of the entire international community. The way the people of South Africa opted for a **negotiated political settlement**, instead of the continuance of a highly politicised but destructive and fruitless low intensity armed conflict, is old news for most, but that **as such** could obviously **not heal the wounds of conflict** caused over the previous forty plus years.

Obviously, different governments and peoples opt for **different ways** of trying to **heal the wounds of conflict**. One way could be to first **eliminate the opposition** before starting to talk about peace, or to draw a line on the past with a **blanket amnesty** for deeds allegedly perpetrated under a previous regime, by all parties involved. South Africa instead set up different **formal mechanisms** to pursue peace, and subsequently nation building and reconciliation. Whatever approach or mechanism is chosen, it must be realised that there are **no quick fixes** and that making peace is **a very integrated and prolonged process**, which will most likely not be achieved by merely promoting tourism in isolation.

In the South African situation, the process is further aggravated by the fact that the **struggle**, despite many perceptions, **did not begin** in the middle of the twentieth century **with** the formalization of the policy of **Apartheid**. In the case of the institutions under my control, **much older struggles** are commemorated. We commemorate what later became known as **the Great Trek**, which took place over the period of **roughly 1835-1854**, and had been caused by the desire of the European settlers, later referred to as the Voortrekkers (Afrikaans word for Pioneers who went first) to be free and to escape the claws of British colonialism and imperialism. In their migration to the interior of the country, contact was established with Black tribes moving

from the North to the South, resulting in numerous bloody wars, campaigns and battles, during which thousands of people perished, mostly over land issues.

A second period of conflict which we commemorate is the period of the **South African Anglo Boer War (1899-1902)**, during which the Boer forces took up arms against the British Empire, in defence of their sovereignty as independent republics established in the interior of the country. Although there were not so many losses due to the armed conflict as such, the scorched earth policy pursued by the British imperial forces, and especially the more than 40 000 women and children of all races who suffered and died in the concentration camps, caused deep wounds of conflict that even today have not been healed fully.

Come **1993/94** and the new winds of change in South Africa, there was still **wide spread mistrust and even fear** about what could happen in the post 1994-dispensation, inter alia with the monuments and museums that were associated with the history of the descendents of the European settlers. In the case of the Voortrekker Monument, which over the previous nearly fifty years had, incorrectly so, been seen by many as an “icon of Apartheid”, it was opted to **privatize the Monument** and to place it under the control of a non-profit company with its own board of directors.

What followed under the inspired and visionary leadership of **President Nelson Mandela**, and the way he actively championed sincere reconciliation and nation building, is also well-known history. I unfortunately do not have the time to dwell on any specifics in this regard, but would like to mention that the then President Mandela **visited the Voortrekker Monument Heritage Site in 2001**, during which he delivered a landmark conciliatory speech. He also issued a written appeal to potential donors to support the Voortrekker Monument financially, and as an institution we still hold him in very high esteem.

The first 5-6 years after 1994 were nevertheless particularly **uncertain and difficult** for the Voortrekker Monument. Deprived of substantial government support, and suffering the effect of a traditional support base that were increasingly withdrawing from public life and deliberately distancing themselves from what was considered to be politically incorrect, the Voortrekker Monument entered a **period of gradual but consistent recession**, until the board of directors towards the end of 1999 consciously decided to break away from the ways of the past.

Since the beginning of **2000** the Voortrekker Monument has followed a completely **different business and management philosophy and style**, which has been so successful that the Monument has greatly overcome its legitimacy challenge and has since become **a role model** for institutions in similar difficult situations.

With an **amplified vision**, i.e. “to be the display window and custodians of the Afrikaners’ history and cultural heritage”, the new management

philosophy was based on **three corner pillars**, namely **sound management, excellent service, and aggressive marketing**; all this is done in **faith**, with **passion** and **extremely hard work**, by every member of the management team and staff of the Monument.

Under **sound management** aspects that receive special attention, include good corporate governance, proper strategic and financial planning and control processes, the expansion, rejuvenation and upliftment of personnel, logistical and project management and the diversifying and securing of new and additional sources of income

Efforts to achieve **excellence of service**, concentrate on the repair, maintenance and expansion of facilities, the development of bench marks of excellent service delivery, training and motivation of employees and most important, placing the accent on a hospitable approach, making all visitors feel equally welcome.

Since the Voortrekker Monument cannot, due to its limited resources, afford a truly **aggressive** and a more costly **marketing** drive, it is done in a more personal and imaginative way and by making skilful use of the media, to achieve the following:

- To improve the **image** of the Monument (From a declining, exclusive “icon of Apartheid” – which it was never intended to be – to one that is rapidly growing, professionally managed, part of the total national heritage estate and open to all South Africans and other visitors).
- To improve its **legitimacy** (measured in terms of acceptability to all citizens of the country with no governmental nor community threat to survival).
- To optimise **tourism** (as the Monument's primary source of revenue).
- To diversify and expand other **sources of revenue** (through commercial use of facilities).

For the purposes of this congress, it is perhaps important to take note of the **specific, tangible steps** taken to improve the Monument's legitimacy, because it has in the process over the past 7 years gained the **reputation** of being **one of the most prominent and positive change agents** in the country.

- The Monument has deliberately **left the trenches of cultural isolation**, and exposed itself as an integral part of the total SA community. A conscious decision was taken to **actively reposition the Monument** as part and parcel of RSA's national heritage estate.
- The **management philosophy and style** was completely revamped.

- The appointment of **Black guides**, and the use of Northern Sotho as a **third language** in the exhibition hall of the Monument, and the **expansion of the exhibitions** in the Voortrekker Monument. Soon an **additional heritage centre** will be constructed on the same site.
- **Active marketing** also aimed at schools from previously disadvantaged communities.
- Adopting a **new, hospitable approach**; making all South Africans and indeed all visitors feeling equally welcome.
- **Specific invitations** to leaders of the Black community, including past-president Mandela.
- This has since been expanded to also include **Black intellectuals and community leaders** in strategy workshops conducted by the Monument.
- Participation with the SANDF to present **cross cultural days**.
- Active, progressive **media liaison**, as well as active **liaison with governmental structures**, including the Ministries and the Departments of Arts and Culture, and of Tourism, the National Heritage Council and other heritage authorities and institutions.
- Promoting active participation in national activities and -holidays and the promotion of the country's "**new**" **symbols**.
- The successful presentation of a **seminar** during October 2006 **on *The Great Trek and the Battle of Blood River; Its Legacy.....*** This seminar was specifically directed at the **redressing and affirmation** of aspects of our common past. It did however **not imply the reconstruction** of the past, but instead gave substance to our stated approach that the history should be revisited in order to clarify and expand aspects thereof, as it used to be seen from one perspective only and therefore could never claim to be truly representative of the country as a whole.
- Actions aimed at the **protection of other cultures and monuments** as well, e.g. publicly condemning the acts of vandalism against statues and monuments that are of significance to other parts of our total community, and lastly
- by being outspokenly and proudly **African, South African, Afrikaansspeaking and Afrikaner!**

The Voortrekker Monument accepts that it **might not be possible to break down all the old perceptions and prejudices overnight**, but it is nevertheless irreversibly on the road of constructive involvement to help ensure a better future for all, and especially for the youth and young people of today.

This does **not** mean that the Voortrekker Monument will **lose its identity in the process or that it stands apart from its own traditional support base**. As a matter of fact, the honest and open-minded manner in which the Monument has managed the process of change up to now, and the way in which it has helped to break down the artificial and discriminatory divisions of the past, has already largely contributed to the consolidation of its support base among all moderate South Africans, and they are increasingly prepared to **proudly associate with and actively support the Voortrekker Monument, as a winning organization, as a tourist destination of choice and a role model** for other heritage institutions and tourism destinations.

Although many and very impressive **indicators of success** over the last 7 years could be cited, I would instead like to **invite all visitors** to South Africa to please visit the Monument, to engage in discussion with us, and to learn more about our origins, our history and our successes and challenges, but equally important, to learn what has been done to properly **contextualize the past in the present**, and how we are engaged in **projecting this into the future, to help to build bridges** and to make our beloved country a better place for all its people. It is easy to glorify and get lost in the past, but the **crux of the matter** is how we are going to use our study of the past, and tourism for that matter, to produce a better future for all concerned, something we as an institution are totally committed to.

20 May 2007.