
MEDIA STATEMENT

Date: Monday, 11 November 2024

Attention: Journalists, News Editors and Executive Producers

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MASILELA RECOMMITS TO RESOLVE STAKEHOLDER IMPASSE REGARDING THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE BARBERTON MAKHONJWA MOUNTAINS WORLD HERITAGE SITE

Barberton – MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Ms. Makhosazane Masilela, says she is very much committed to resolve the seeming impasse on who should finally become the management authority of the Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains World Heritage Site (Barberton-MMWHS). She said this during a two-day fact-finding visit by the minister of Forestry, Fisheries and the Environment, Dr Dion George, to Mpumalanga to meet BMMWHS stakeholders. The MEC has, however, raised a concern regarding the use of two separate venues for different stakeholders by the minister, indicating that the action bordered on racial lines.

“I am totally disappointed by the minister’s unilateral decision to meet the two groups of stakeholders in separate venues. As the host Province, we were requested by the minister to arrange an engagement with the two groups of stakeholders at one venue, and we had arranged to meet at the Barberton Museum. However, I was taken aback when I learnt this morning that the minister has decided to meet BATOBIC at a private venue owned by one of the members. He did not even have the courtesy to, at least, inform me of his last-minute decision. I was with him for the better part of yesterday, when he toured the geo-sites at the Barberton Makhonjwa Mountains World Heritage Site, but he never bothered to inform me about such a decision.

I, as well as the Executive Mayors of Ehlanzeni and Gert Sibande District Municipalities, and the Speaker of the City of Mbombela, were not even invited to that private meeting, which to me, bordered along racial lines. Why should he meet people with a different skin colour privately, and even at a guest house belonging to one of them, when the arrangement was that all stakeholders will be met at the Barberton Museum? Is he not perpetuating racial segregation in this way?”, asked a disappointed MEC.

The minister did not even answer why he met BATOBIC (Barberton Tourism and Biodiversity Corridor) members separately at a private venue, and why the MEC and municipal leaders were excluded from the meeting, when asked by stakeholders at a broader engagement later on.

“I will definitely ask the Premier to raise this matter with the President; it cannot be that a national leader comes to our Province and does not recognise us, as local leaders. We will not accept that our people should be treated differently, when we are one nation”, added Ms. Masilela.

BATOBI had written to the minister to raise concerns about the development taking place at the Barberton-MMWHS, under the management authority of the MTPA (Mpumalanga Tourism and Agency Agency). The minister arrived in the Province yesterday (Sunday, 10 November 2024) and started by visiting geo-sites at the BMMWHS to familiarise himself, and concluded with stakeholder engagements today (Monday, 11 November 2024) albeit at two different venues in Mjindi.

“As the Department, working with all municipalities surrounding the World Heritage Site, we recommit to engage all stakeholders so that the development of geo-sites continues in earnest. We will leave no one behind as we develop this tourism route as a new catalyst for tourism growth and job creation in our Province”, concluded the MEC.

-ENDS-

Issued by the Department of Economic Development and Tourism

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***Notes to Editors:**

The Department of Economic Development and Tourism, under the Mpumalanga Provincial Government, is constitutionally mandated to stimulate economic growth and development in the Province, so as to create sustainable and decent employment, economic transformation and to alleviate poverty. The Department has three (3) Public Entities; namely, Mpumalanga Economic Growth Agency (MEGA), Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), and Mpumalanga Economic Regulator (MER), to which it has delegated some of its constitutionally-mandated functions. These functions relate to: trade and investment promotion; funding of SMMEs; tourism growth and development; tourism marketing; regulation of the gambling and liquor industries, including collection of gambling levies and liquor license fees, amongst others.