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Media statement by Minister of Tourism Patricia de Lille, Mandela Day outreach, It is in our hands to make a difference and help the most vulnerable in society

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This year as we mark Mandela Day under the theme: “It’s in your hands”, I think of the many men and women across the country who open their hands and serve the most vulnerable every day.

They are the men and women in our communities serving soup or sandwiches, selling fruit or vegetables at a price that’s affordable to the poor, they are the ones taking care of children or running community gardens. They are the heroes of our country, they are the ones who live the ethos of former President, Nelson Mandela’s life: to serve with humility and compassion.

They emulate the life of Tata Nelson Mandela by opening their homes to provide shelter, by feeding a hungry child or families, by lending a hand in any way they can to lighten the burden on the most vulnerable in our society.

Mandela Day on 18 July each year, is marked by South Africans coming together to perform an act of service to those in need. Also known as “67 minutes for Mandela” to reflect Madiba’s 67 years of service to the country, people all over the country roll up their sleeves to serve the needy.

This year South Africans are called to contribute to turning the tide against food insecurity and climate change in honour of Nelson Mandela's legacy.

Climate change threatens to reverse the progress our country has made towards eradicating hunger and malnutrition.

South Africans can also play their part in securing our food supply through home or community food gardens.

Apart from climate change, the economic constraints make it increasingly difficult for people to put food on their tables and especially the most vulnerable in our society often go to bed without having a meal for the day.

It is sadly an indictment that 29 years since the dawn of our democracy, that many families and children struggle to get food and often go days without a meal.

As a country, across all sectors, we simply must do more. We need to go beyond Mandela Day and 67 minutes, but look for ways each day to serve and help those in need.

Whether it is planting seeds or making a sandwich for someone in need on our daily journeys, every small act of service is a reflection of humanity and our morals.

As the father of our nation, Nelson Mandela said: "Our economic approach to food and its distribution reflects our basic moral values".
END QUOTE.

There is so much more we can do in our daily lives to feed a hungry person. Our gestures need not be grand but any small offer of service or donation we can make, will mean the world to someone in need.

Unpacking clothing or blankets no longer being used and donating it to someone in need, is the wave of warmth we need more of to bring comfort and hope to those living in despair.

This year, as part of Mandela Day activities, I visited an impoverished community in Riemvasmaak in the ZF Mgcawu District Municipality in the Northern Cape.

In the early 1970s there were forced removals of the residents of this beautiful mountain desert wilderness mostly Damara and Koranna Khoi tribes - by the then Apartheid government. Around 1 500 people were divided into three groups according to their 'racial' classification and sent to either Welcomes in the Ciskei, Khorixas in Northern Namibia, or the nearby towns of Marchand, Augrabies and Keimoes. A little after 1994 the current government chose to return this land to the children of the original residents.

In 1994, 75 000 ha of land was returned to the people of Riemvasmaak. This was the first land restitution project announced by then State President of South Africa, Nelson Mandela.

As such it is a legacy project of President Mandela. The claim was first lodged with the Advisory Commission on Land Allocation (ACLA) in 1992, just two years before the dawn of the newly democratically elected government in April 1994. On 11 February 1994, the ACLA recommended that the land known as the Riemvasmaak Reserve be restored to the community and President Nelson Mandela accepted and approved the land restitution claim.

Riemvasmaak is 75 000 hectares of sheer mountain desert wilderness, located between the Orange and the dry Molopo Rivers, approximately 57km from Kakamas and 170km from the Nakop Border Post with Namibia.

The town is managed by a Riemvasmaak Board of Trustees. The Trust has realised that one way to make Riemvasmaak sustainable is through enhanced tourism development.

A number of projects are underway to develop the tourism offering in this area which are already bringing benefits to the community.

However, the community is still confronted with high levels of poverty and unemployment.

We reached out to the community leadership to ask how we could assist and serve them as part of Mandela Day activities and the request was for non-perishable food and blankets.

I was joined by the Northern Cape MEC for Economic Development and Tourism, Abraham Vosloo to hand over a donation of 100 bulk packs of non-perishable foods and blankets to bring some relief to this community in need.

As Tata Madiba said: "Freedom is meaningless if people cannot put food in their stomachs." END QUOTE.

We hope that the donation will bring comfort to the community and we will continue to work with them to develop tourism projects in the area to enable sustainable economic growth for the community of Riemvasmaak.

The provincial department of tourism is working with the community to develop various tourism projects.

One of the projects is a community owned tourism facility where the Northern Cape Department of Tourism improved holiday chalets to the value of R649 000.

The Riemvasmaak Trust is a partner on this project which has also created several job opportunities for community members.

The upgrade of the chalets has improved the comfort and experience of the guests which ultimately increases guest satisfaction. This also ensures that guests return as facilities are more appealing and ultimately will lead to increased visitor numbers and income.

Accommodation at the Riemvasmaak hot springs is in comfortable 8-bed or 4-bed chalets, all blending into their rocky background with spectacular views over the Riemvasmaak granite canyon. Each chalet has a kitchenette, toilet, shower, washbasin and braai area.

Riemvasmaak Hot Springs invites visitors to relax in the natural wonder of these therapeutic waters. Cliff-faces surround the springs, towering 80 metres over those that are delighting in the warmth of the waters below. Two swimming pools have been constructed at the springs.

More jobs were created with the purchasing of new furniture for the chalets, artwork bought from local artists, building of ablution facilities for the day visitors and camping ground, replacement of the electricity line, replacing of the roof for the lapa at the Hotsprings, office equipment, two-way radios and Wi-Fi installation.

In addition, 6 young people were also trained in massage therapy at the Central University of Technology with all six of the recruits passing the course with distinction. They all received a massage bed and products.

Future plans for the community includes redevelopment of the recreational area and the establishment of a day spa at the hot springs. Conceptual designs have started for this project by the Northern Cape Department of Economic Development and Tourism.

As the National Department of Tourism, we are working closely with the provincial department and the Northern Cape Tourism Authority on various projects and we will continue to support tourism development for all areas of the Northern Cape as one of the most unique and awe-inspiring holiday destinations in our country.

It is in our hands and we must take hands and work closer with communities to bring about economic development that will truly free all our people from poverty and hunger.

Mandela's life and sacrifices should be a reminder and motivator to all of us each day to serve with humility and help bring progress in any way we can to ensure all people in South Africa taste the fruits of our democracy.

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