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SPEECH

DATE: 22 JUNE 2025

MINISTER OF TOURISM PATRICIA DE LILLE'S REMARKS AT THE LAUNCH OF THE KGODUMODUMO DINOSAUR INTERPRETATION CENTRE GOLDEN GATE HIGHLANDS NATIONAL PARK, FREE STATE

Dumelang, Sanibonani, Good morning, Goeie more!

It is a profound honour to stand here today at the foot of the Maluti mountains, where ancient history meets present-day progress — and where a remarkable dream has come to life.

We gather to launch the Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Interpretation Centre — not just a building of brick and mortar, but a living gateway into South Africa's deep past and dynamic future.

This Centre marks the place where the oldest known dinosaur embryos in the world — those of the *Massospondylus* — were discovered, right here in our beloved Free State.

This Centre tells the story of a world 200 million years ago, yet it is also a story of the Basotho people, whose ancient wisdom and oral traditions gave rise to the mythical Kgodumodumo, now brought to life in scientific exhibition. That is heritage, that is identity.

This centre also tells the story of the land claimant settlement agreement which includes a beneficiation package that largely consists of eco-tourism opportunities on their land, such as the camping site, horse riding, mountain biking, a 4x4 trail and hiking trails. The claimant's beneficiaries receive 5% of each of the game off-takes, whether it is the sale of meat or live game auctions. It also includes share equity of the coffee shop and proposed curio shop sales of any new PPP Concession in the park such as the proposed Zipline business which is coming soon.

Lastly, 50% of job creation opportunities where possible and that is the reason for the tourist guide training at Golden Gate Highlands National Park.

Our fossil record provides evidence for us to say to the entire world "Welcome Home!". From the fossil evidence we know that Africa is both the Cradle of Humankind and Cradle of Human Culture. Our fossil wealth, long rock and fossil record is so unique that it is impossible to write about the development of life on Earth without referring to the South African fossil record.

I want to acknowledge that the Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Interpretation Centre has been made possible through close collaboration and partnership between the Department of Tourism, Evolutionary Studies Institute of the University of the Witwatersrand, South African National Parks,

National Treasury, the Department of Forestry, Fisheries and Environment, the Free State Province and most importantly, the surrounding communities who have supported this project and will continue to do so as they visit, engage and tell of their own experiences with this centre and our history.

We are grateful for the generous donor funding from European Union of R120 million. I want to thank all partners for their invaluable contributions, both past and future.

We are happy to have of Professors Bruce Rubidge and Jonah Choiniere who are with us today and who I understand have graciously assisted with making sure that the information I share today is scientifically accurate.

As you have heard today it was one of the palaeontologists from this University, Professor James Kitching who here in Golden Gate, made a momentous discovery of a clutch of the oldest dinosaur eggs in the world of the dinosaur Massospondylus. Subsequent work at this site revealed more nests at different levels, indicating that this was a seasonal nesting place for dinosaurs.

We have created something both monumental and meaningful. Let us be clear: This is not just a museum. Government is diversifying tourism attractions to grow tourism.

The Interpretation Centre will act as a catalyst for broader tourism development in the Free State's rural economy. A nation that works for all, works together! It will boost domestic tourism to the Free State province as one of our least visited provinces.

The province of the Free State is not a place to travel through but a place to travel to!

We have trained 15 tour guides from the local community. Another example of benefit to the community is the SMME Phoka Coffee — a proudly Basotho initiative that blends heritage with business, while our future tourist guides are preparing to lead thousands through these landscapes.

We are committed to ensuring every learner, especially from previously disadvantaged schools, has a chance to visit and be inspired. To our communities, community leaders, scientists, journalists, and creatives here today: This Centre belongs to you too. Use your platforms to share its story. Use your voices to remind our nation that South Africa's rural provinces hold treasures to offer our country and the world.

As we cut the ribbon today, let us open more than doors — let us open minds, opportunities, and horizons. Together, we are not just preserving the past. We are building a shared future. It is my great honour to declare the Kgodumodumo Dinosaur Interpretation Centre officially open.

Baie dankie. Ke a leboha. Thank you.

- ENDS -

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