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Ministers Molewa and Hanekom unveiled the Sisulu Circle at the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden in Roodepoort

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The Sisulu Circle Garden, a landscaped area paying tribute to the late Walter Sisulu, was officially unveiled by the Minister of Environmental Affairs, Dr Edna Molewa and Minister of Tourism, Mr Derek Hanekom at the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden, in Roodepoort, today.

The Garden, which includes a bust sculpture of the late Walter Sisulu, a water feature with aquatic plants, information and interpretation points, showcases a range of tourism and marketing initiatives funded by the Department of Tourism.

Speaking at the official unveiling of the Sisulu Circle, Minister Molewa reiterated that South Africa is the third-most mega-diverse country in the world, millions of people annually experience the beauty and bounty of our magnificent country through visits to, for example, places such as the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden.

“Our natural heritage remains one of the most popular attractions for South Africans, some of whom are able to enjoy brief sojourns to the botanical gardens found in eight of our provinces to reconnect with nature, and to relax,” said Molewa.

“The introduction of the Sisulu Circle here is an ideal opportunity for the public, and in particular the youth, to reconnect with our country’s important heritage. It is an opportunity to not only honour a great man, but to learn more about the role played by Walter Sisulu in the attainment of the democracy and freedoms we have enjoyed since 1994,” added Molewa.

The 276ha Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden was established in 1982, and is one of SANBI’s network of national botanical gardens currently spread across seven provinces of South Africa.

Formerly known as the Witwatersrand National Botanical Garden, the garden was renamed the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden in 2004 through an initiative taken by the then Minister of Environmental Affairs and Tourism, Minister Valli Moosa, to honour the life and work of Walter Sisulu.

The Garden plays an important conservation role, including protection of one of the few remaining populations of the Endangered Albertina Sisulu Orchid (*Brachycorythis conica* ssp. *transvaalensis*) in Gauteng that is being threatened by pending housing developments and uncontrolled recreational vehicle activities. The garden also hosts a breeding pair of Verreaux’s Eagles.

Nearly 250 bird species have so far been recorded in the Garden.

The Sisulu Circle was funded by the Department of Tourism as part of its plans to develop tourism destinations across the country and enhance visitor experience.

The Department has father signed a Master Agreement with SANBI to implement improvements at Thohoyandou (National) Botanical Garden, Mokopane National Zoological Gardens and the Mokopane Biodiversity Conservation Centre (MBCC).

“Through our modest investment in this new addition to the garden, we are putting our money where our mouth is. We will continue to work with our sister department to improve on public assets of high tourism growth potential, this ensures that our contribution makes a difference in improving their visitor offerings” said Derek Hanekom, Minister of Tourism.

Jointly issued by the Departments of Environmental Affairs and Tourism

“The naming of this rare Orchid in honour Mama Albertina and the completion of the Sisulu Circle could not have come at an appropriate moment. It is a priceless gesture and the celebration of a legacy as we honour Mama Albertina Sisulu on this year of the centenary of her birth.”

“The accolades with which this garden prides itself makes it any tourist’s, must-go-to place,” he added.

The Walter Sisulu NBG is one of the fastest growing gardens amongst the South African National Biodiversity Institute’s (SANBI) network of gardens, attracting more than 300 000 visitors per annum.

The Garden has been voted the Best Place to Get Back to Nature in Gauteng for nine consecutive years and also the best picnic spot in Johannesburg Reader’s Choice publication. It was listed in Huffington Post as second amongst a list of 13 of the best botanical gardens in the world. It is also listed as the second best tourism place to visit in Gauteng by the SA Tourism website.

The Sisulu Circle will enable hundreds of thousands of visitors to the Walter Sisulu National Botanical Garden, and both current and future generations, to appreciate Walter Sisulu’s legacy, personal sacrifice and significant contribution made over a period of 90 years towards the achievement of democracy in South Africa.

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