

**ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR FINANCE, ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND TOURISM,
MR VUSI MKHATSHWA, MPL, DURING THE OCCASION OF THE VISIT AT DR ESTHER
MAHLANGU GUESTHOUSE, MTHAMBOTHINI, DR JS MOROKA LOCAL
MUNICIPALITY**

Thursday, 30 September 2021

Programme Director;
Executive Mayor of Nkangala District Municipality;
Executive Mayor of Dr JS Moroka Local Municipality;
Chairperson of the MTPA Board, Mr Victor Mashego;
Other Board members present;
CEO of the MTPA, Mr Johannes Nobunga;
Government and MTPA officials present;
Dr Esther Mahlangu;
Our esteemed guests;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen;

Lotshani!

1. Programme Director; I am indeed happy and excited to be part of this important event of celebrating our global icon, Dr Esther Mahlangu, Igugu Lesitjhaba; we pride ourselves as the Department of Economic Development and Tourism, on behalf of the people of Mpumalanga, to share the world with this outstanding figure, who represent our collective heritage as South Africans through art.
2. Just last Friday, we celebrated Heritage Day; and we are delighted that the Ndebele culture of painting continues to be nurtured and protected through the hands of *gogo* Esther. She continues to be the epitome of our rich culture in this Province; she's a beacon that shines into the future; and that is why we must continue to celebrate and acknowledge her work whilst she's still alive.
3. Dr Esther Mahlangu has unashamedly placed Mpumalanga and South Africa on the world map through her bold, geometric canvases, inspired by the patterns and palettes of Ndebele house painting and beadwork, as she is popularly characterised by many writers.
4. It is befitting, therefore, that we close this year's Tourism Month, by coming to pay homage to our Province's pride. We take pride in the work of Dr Mahlangu, who selflessly continues to impart her painting skill to the upcoming ones. This is the only way that we can preserve the iconic and colourful Ndebele paintings for posterity.
5. Programme director, our appreciation to our arts icon is not only through word of mouth, but through tangible things. As such, we had sent a team of officials from the Mpumalanga Tourism and Parks Agency (MTPA), to link-up with the foundation of Dr Esther Mahlangu, with the purpose of conducting an assessment and needs analysis of the guesthouse, so that we can intervene were necessary, in the context of upgrades.

6. And, it is our considered view that the upgrades should also be done, to meet the Tourism Standards as per the Grading Council guidelines. I must also indicate that, this accommodation facility, will be under subsidy through the MTPA, to facilitate the process of grading for a period of three (3) years.
7. It would have been an injustice of unimaginable proportions, if we continued to turn a blind eye on the conditions of this facility, as this would have created a quagmire for '**Brand Dr Esther Mahlangu**'. This would have been inconsistent with what she represents, at a global scale, as a cultural artist extraordinaire.
8. Programme director, we must surely pay more attention on this facility; we should make it one of the emblematic facilities through the MTPA. This must be a strategic and significant facility which exhibit and tell a story of the indigenous South African people, through artistic expression, intrinsically linked to culture and heritage.
9. We honestly pride ourselves, to be associated with Dr Esther Mahlangu, and the work she has been doing with leading international brands like BMW, Rolls-Royce, British Airways, Fiat and even through quenching thirst with a bottle Belvedere luxury vodka, covered with spruce Ndebele traditional artistic designs.
10. Clearly, we couldn't conclude this tourism month without visiting the homestead of this iconic South Africa's human treasure; the world-renowned proud carrier of our indigenous knowledge system. We are, indeed, proud of Dr Esther Mahlangu's work; she remains a torchbearer; an embodiment of our cultural diversity and rich heritage which defines us a people.
11. We must also report to our iconic figure here this morning, that since we started with our action plan of re-activating tourism in the Province, after it was badly affected by the black Swan events of COVID-19, that last weekend saw Tourism Mpumalanga profiting immensely out of the visits of people into our Province. As a result, most tourism businesses got a boost, and this is a result of the aggressive campaigns we undertook since the beginning of the tourism month.
12. We strongly believe that once this guest house is fully renovated, it will see quite a lot of people booking accommodation here, when they come to visit the Arts Centre to experience the work of our icon through their naked eye.
13. We commit to see this renovation project to the end; we commit never to leave it unfinished, as it is part of preserving our culture and heritage. I know that some people might be wondering how arts links up with tourism. Let me tell you, they link up very well; when people visit the Arts Centre, they will be touring; they will book accommodation and contribute to tourism growth.
14. And that is why, as the Department through the MTPA, we have so much interest in the guest house and arts centre here.
15. *Sithokoza khulukhulu kemambhala gog' Mahlangu*, for agreeing to partner with us, as government.

16. Programme Director; even though today is the last day of Tourism Month 2021, we should not lose the momentum. We should continue to create awareness about the significance of domestic tourism in the broader tourism growth. Yes, we should always strive to achieve inclusive growth through tourism.

17. ***Let's Grow Mpumalanga Together*** through tourism revival!

#ExploreMpumalanga

#VisitMpumalanga

#DiscoverMpumalanga

#Silindzile

#WeDoTourism!

I thank you!