

Walking the Constitution

Tuesday 10 November 2009

SOUTH Africa embraces among the world's most progressive constitutions, safe-guarding the rights and beliefs of the millions of citizens living within its borders in a far cry from the horrors of apartheid and the indelible scar that marked the lives of people within Sedibeng.

Sedibeng district was established in 2000 on the rich history of Evaton, Heidelberg, Sharpeville, Boipatong, Sebokeng, Vereeniging, Vanderbijlpark, Vaal Oewers, Vaal Marina and Suikerbosrand.

Next March marks the 50th anniversary of the Sharpeville massacre, an event that defined apartheid in international eyes and raised the ante in terms of fighting the former regime.

Executive Mayor of the Sedibeng District Municipality, Mahole Simon Mofokeng, says the constitution evolved from detailed and inclusive negotiations, difficult but determined, conducted "with an acute awareness of the injustices of the country's non-democratic past".

"Human rights are given clear prominence, featuring in the preamble with its stated intention of establishing a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights and in the opening chapter with the founding provisions of South Africa. Among those rights are equality, freedom of expression and association, political and property rights, housing, healthcare, education, access to information and access to the courts – and all are taken seriously by local citizens," he says.

Former president Nelson Mandela chose the George Thabe stadium in Sharpeville to sign the constitution into law, while Vereeniging was the site for signing the 1910 Union of South Africa declaration, meaning Sedibeng is intrinsically-linked with the country's pre-eminent legal document.

The Executive Mayor says the paved and landscaped Constitution Walk links the stadium with the Sharpeville Memorial and provides visitors with the insights into the founding and legal background for the country's constitution. Several secondary routes link places like the church precinct, house of the Sharpeville Six, Phelindaba cemetery (where those killed on March 21, 1960 are buried), houses of the first black neurosurgeon and librarian.

He says Sedibeng was investing in several initiatives that raises Constitution Walk to the prominence deserved including displaying public art along the routes; replacing the gravel with pathways on the traffic circle; paving Constitutional Walk; landscaping and introducing street furniture like bollards and dustbins.

The investment forms part of the R57 million earmarked by the municipality for upgrading Constitution Walk, the Sharpeville exhibition centre and the Sharpeville cemetery.

A metal sculpture outside the George Thabe stadium represents the signing of the constitution based on the image of Mandela and Cyril Ramaphosa holding aloft the newly-signed document.



Double-sided mosaic billboards around the traffic circle will document the key moments in drawing up the constitution. The reverse side will reflect children's responses to different clauses drawn from a competition opened to local schools in line with the brief.

The winning 20 entrants will attend a workshop to develop their drawings under the guidance of professional artists.

Mofokeng says while Sedibeng is not a host city for next year's Fifa World Cup Soccer, the District has been confirmed as a base camp for two countries and offers significant heritage and cultural tourism opportunities.

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