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[PRESS STATEMENT]

National Heritage Day 2020 | Building a #CollectiveCulture

The 24th of September, Heritage Day, in South Africa, is reserved as a national public holiday to celebrate the diverse cultures and traditions that make up South Africa's contemporary social life.

South Africa's history is scarred by divisive regimes including colonialism and apartheid which sought to create a segregated and unequal society through a racialized social structure. In celebrating South Africa's liberation and the wealth of cultural diversity. This day of celebration enables the prioritisation of the all people from across the African continent and rest of the world who contribute to the rich cultures and forms of knowledge we have in South Africa today.

The theme for Heritage Day 2020 is '*celebrating South Africa's living treasures*¹. In launching this theme Minister Nathi Mthethwa noted that the Department of Arts and Culture would '*double-up the effort in ensuring that these suppressed knowledge forms receive the recognition and support they deserve; not only for aesthetic reasons, but also because of the potentiality of their political economy.*' This was also echoed by President of Republic of South Africa in his speech on the easing of lockdown alert level on the 16th September 2020 when he reiterated that "I urge everyone to use this public holiday as family time, to reflect on the difficult journey we have all travelled, to remember those who have lost their lives, and to quietly rejoice in the remarkable and diverse heritage of our nation". He further indicated that it will take the combined effort of each and every South African to restore our nation to prosperity and development.

On this day the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA) will be celebrating the valuable contributions that refugees, asylum seekers and migrants have made historically and continue to make to South Africa's society and development. CoRMSA has launched a social media campaign **#CollectiveCulture** to share the cultures and traditions of local and migrant persons which are to be celebrated. This campaign will provide an opportunity for all to share responsibility and reflects the global context of heritage as part of cultural identity that makes us as one human species.

Thifuluheli Sinthumule CoRMSA's Director notes that: "For South Africa, Heritage Day is a strategic day to prioritise and strengthen social cohesion, peaceful co-existence and nation building. It provides an opportunity for the convergence of cultures and traditions that cross barriers of race, nationality, gender, ethnicity, culture and language. This day further offers an opportunity for all to reflect on what it means to be a South African resident in the context of nation building and a unified vision of a South Africa that embraces its peoples in all their diversities, rather than what divides the nation such as xenophobia, homophobia and racism"

CoRMSA locates Heritage Day as one of the strategic levers to promote the inclusion of refugees, asylum seekers and migrants into South Africa's communities, social and economic development. CoRMSA calls and urges all South Africans, civil society groups, the faith based fraternity, business sector and government to join hands with Department of Justice and Constitutional Development in prioritising and promptly implementing the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (NAP) by implementing indicators for activities and outputs to be realised, and in so doing promote inclusive communities and ensure accountability where incidents of xenophobia occur.

CoRMSA invites all people to celebrate our collective culture by acknowledging that My Culture is Our Culture as we work towards a more unified and cohesive South Africa free from hatred, gender based violence, homophobia and racism. Peaceful co-existence is possible if we all embrace our cultural diversity with pride and equality. A South Africa that belongs to all who live in it, is possible!

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¹ <https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-nathi-mthethwa-launch-heritage-month-7-sep-2020-0000>