



## **MEDIA STATEMENT**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**WEDNESDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2014**

To: All Media

Att: News Editors

### **PROTECTION OF THE AUTOPSY REPORTS OF STEVE BIKO AND AHMED TIMOL**

The South African Heritage Resources Agency (SAHRA) welcomes the court ruling as a result of the intervention of the Biko family and Biko Foundation to stop the auctioning of the autopsy reports of Steve Biko and Ahmed Timol. Both men were leaders in the history of South Africa and are associated with the liberation struggle in the history of South Africa. As part of our mandate, SAHRA has declared the gravesite of Steve Biko as a site of national significance.

SAHRA lauds the Biko Family and the Steve Biko Foundation for stopping the sale of the reports and for contesting ownership thereof by a third party. The question arises as to what other documents or objects of significance the third party has in their collection that they intend selling for private gain.

It is hoped that this court case would set a precedent that would discourage those who by whatever means have acquired significant heritage objects in their collections from selling those and to instead, make them accessible for current and future generations.

In terms of the National Heritage Resources Act, No. 25 of 1999 (the Act), such documents are heritage objects that form part of the national estate and as such are protected and may not be exported without a permit from SAHRA. In addition, the Act stipulates that heritage objects in State custody may not be alienated without SAHRA being consulted and the State must conserve these for future generations.

“It is not the first time that documents and other heritage objects associated with important leaders and events in the history of South Africa lands up in private hands and are sold for gain. The late Judge Percy Yutar ended up with the Rivonia Trial court documents in his

collection which was later inherited by his off-spring and sold on auction for private gain". Said SAHRA Acting Chief Executive Officer Ms. Catherine Motsisi.

Fortunately, these documents are now safe in a state Library. Two cupboards custom built for the Rivonia Trial also formed part of Judge Yutar's private collection and was offered on sale on Gumtree.

It is reprehensible that an autopsy report which is a health record according to the Health Professions Council of South Africa (1974) which should be retained to:

- Promote teaching and research;
- Be used as research data; and
- Be kept for historical purposes that in terms of the Act is a heritage object associated with a leader and event in the history of South Africa end up in the hands of people who are not related to the family who regards it as a commodity to be traded with and sold to the highest bidder.

According to The Second-Hand Goods Act, 6 of 2009 (s23(1)(c)) no dealer may take into his/her possession goods unless he or she is convinced on reasonable grounds that the seller of the goods is the owner or titleholder thereof or is duly authorised to dispose thereof. The question arises whether original ownership has been legally obtained.

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**Issued by the South African Heritage Resource Agency (SAHRA)**

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