



SOUTH AFRICAN HERITAGE RESOURCES AGENCY

## PROPOSED DECLARATION OF THE COLLECTION OF GIFTS BESTOWED ON NELSON MANDELA AS A SPECIFICALLY DECLARED HERITAGE COLLECTION

BACKGROUND

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AN AGENCY OF THE DEPARTMENT OF SPORT, ARTS AND CULTURE



## BACKGROUND TO DECLARATION OF GIFTS BESTOWED TO NELSON MANDELA

The late Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela was a South African anti-apartheid revolutionary, political leader, and philanthropist, who served as President of South Africa from 1994 to 1999. He was the first black democratically elected President. Mandela was born in the rural area called Mvezo and grew up in Mqhekezweni and later stayed in Qunu in the former Transkei Bantustan in Eastern Cape where he was laid to rest in December 2013.

He was born into a royal family of abaThembu. His father Gadla Mandela was the Chief of abaThembu. Chief Mandela resisted the rule of the Apartheid Government, and he refused to comply to the orders. One could argue that Chief Gadla played a significant role in mentoring or influencing his son Nelson Mandela to become a political activist. His leadership skills and political activities deepened when he was a student at the University of Fort Hare in Eastern Cape where he was elected as the president of the Student Representative Council.

Mandela's life journey - from a village boy and student leader to political activist, prisoner, statesman and global moral leader - shaped not only the political history of South Africa, but the conscience of the world.

Mandela lived up to his values of ubuntu, as evidenced by his substantial legacy. His leadership was rooted in anti-racism, equality, education and service, values that continue to resonate across generations through initiatives such as 67 Minutes of service and his enduring example of sport, especially rugby, as a vehicle for national unity.

The gifts presented to Mandela are inseparable from his life history. They were not received as private possessions, but as symbolic gestures of admiration, solidarity and honour. Mandela accepted such gifts on the condition that they be preserved and shared with the people of South Africa, particularly within the Eastern Cape, close to his home village of Qunu.

### STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The collection comprises approximately 3,900 verified objects, including beadwork, textiles, sculptures, portraits, medals, orders, paintings, brass artefacts, leather and gold items, handcrafted postcards, newspaper articles and children's drawings. Together, these objects reflect the breadth of Mandela's influence across cultures, nations and generations. Diplomatic gifts from heads of state sit alongside handmade cards from children; ceremonial objects coexist with everyday items that speak to Mandela's humanity, humility and connection to ordinary people.

This collection is more than an assemblage of gifted objects. It is a material record of South Africa's re-entry into the global community, of international solidarity with the





anti-apartheid struggle, and of the symbolic role Mandela came to occupy as a moral leader in the world. The gifts transcend language, race and borders, bearing witness to a moment in history when South Africa's democratic transition carried global significance.

The collection continues to serve an educational and social purpose, supporting learning, research and public engagement with South Africa's history.

