



Leaders in Environmental Management

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SA jumps in to save African heritage sites

Article by Sheree Russouw originally published in the Saturday Star, 29/04/2006



Fourteen endangered World Heritage sites across Africa are to benefit from a multimillion-rand rescue package that aims to preserve them for future generations. On Friday, South Africa plans to unveil the African World Heritage Fund, which will support countries without the budgets and skill to guard their proclaimed natural and cultural treasures.

South Africa - home to seven World Heritage sites - has been credited with pioneering the birth of the fund.

At a ceremony at the Cradle of Humankind in Maropeng, west of Johannesburg, the departments of arts and culture and of environmental affairs and tourism will jointly contribute R20-million to the fund. China, the Netherlands, India and Israel have also pledged their financial support.

Thirty-four of the world's 812 World Heritage sites have been placed on the World Heritage Endangered List - and 14 of these are in Africa.

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation blames "armed conflict and war, earthquakes and other natural disasters, pollution, poaching, uncontrolled urbanisation and unchecked tourist development" for the destruction of natural and cultural sites.

The creation of the fund stems from talks between this country, Benin, Nigeria, Egypt and Zimbabwe last July at a meeting of the World Heritage Committee in Durban.

Delegates agreed that African sites were in critical need of funding for "maintenance, capacity-building, and awareness-raising".

Africa is the most under-represented continent on the World Heritage List and accounts for only around seven percent of the world's natural and cultural sites of significance.

Cultural and heritage symbols are central to the "development agenda", Arts and Culture Minister Pallo Jordan said this week.

Historically, there had been a tendency to see heritage conservation as "monument preservation", he said.

"Although monuments are contained in the list, heritage must include intangible heritage in the form of customs, practices, traditions and forms of indigenous knowledge not classically considered heritage."

Ahead of Friday's launch, renowned palaeontologist Professor Phillip Tobias is due to give a short lecture to delegates at the Sterkfontein Caves on Wednesday.