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HERITAGE NEWSLETTER

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Champions of African heritage towards social cohesion.

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EDITORIAL TEAM

CHIEF EDITOR AND WRITER

Tsireledzo Mandane

EDITORS

Amos Mulaudzi
Khwezi Mpumlwana
Dr. Merriam Tawane
Tebogo Shilakwe

LAYOUT & DESIGN

Shepherd Makhura

FOR EDITORIAL ENQUIRIES CONTACT:

Editor: Tsireledzo Mandane / E-mail: t.mandane@nhc.org.za
Tel: 012 748 3949 | Address: 2nd Floor Building 3, Summit Place Business
Park 221 Garsfontein Road, Menlyn, Pretoria



*Adv. Tshepo Maake
Acting: Chief Executive Officer,
National Heritage Council of South Africa*

MESSAGE FROM THE ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

Heritage is integral to our identity, connecting us to our past, shaping our present and guiding our future. As the National Heritage Council (NHC), we remain committed to promoting, protecting and preserving South Africa's rich and diverse heritage for current and future generations.

This August/September edition highlights our efforts to recognise heritage champions, empower young people, preserve indigenous knowledge and document the cultural histories that contribute to our national identity.

A key highlight is the 13th Golden Shield Heritage Awards, which recognise individuals, organisations and communities for their contributions to heritage preservation and promotion. By celebrating these champions, we acknowledge their dedication and inspire others to participate in safeguarding our cultural and historical legacy.

We are equally encouraged by Sitintile Secondary School's victory in the 2026 Heritage Education Schools Outreach Programme (HESOP) National Competition. This achievement demonstrates the value of heritage education in nurturing young people's appreciation of their history, culture and traditions. Such initiatives encourage learners to become active participants in preserving our shared heritage.

Our collaboration with the Makuleke Traditional Council to empower young people to preserve indigenous knowledge highlights the importance of community partnerships. Indigenous knowledge systems embody wisdom and experiences passed down through generations. Encouraging young people to learn from elders, document local practices and safeguard traditional knowledge ensures these valuable resources remain relevant.

The call for young people to become custodians of Africa reinforces the importance of intergenerational knowledge transfer. Young people are not merely inheritors of heritage; they are essential partners in its preservation and development. We must create opportunities for them to engage with their communities and contribute to safeguarding Africa's diverse cultural legacy.

The NHC-funded publication preserving George's diverse heritage demonstrates the importance of research and documentation in protecting our collective memory. Recording local histories and cultural experiences ensures community contributions are recognised and preserved within South Africa's broader national narrative.

These efforts align with the opinion piece, "Our Living Heritage," which reminds us that heritage extends beyond monuments and historical sites. It lives through our languages, oral traditions, customs, beliefs and everyday practices. Heritage remains relevant when communities celebrate traditions, share knowledge and pass values to future generations.

The initiatives featured in this edition demonstrate that heritage preservation requires collective responsibility and sustained collaboration among government, traditional leaders, educational institutions, heritage practitioners and communities. Through these partnerships, we can strengthen heritage awareness, promote social cohesion and ensure our cultural legacy remains valued and protected.

The NHC remains committed to advancing heritage education, supporting community-led initiatives and promoting inclusive heritage preservation. I encourage all stakeholders, particularly young people, to take an active interest in understanding, celebrating and safeguarding our heritage.

Together, let us honour those who came before us, preserve the knowledge entrusted to us and ensure our living heritage remains a source of identity, dignity and unity for generations to come.

Yours in heritage,

Adv. Tshepo Maake

**Acting Chief Executive Officer
National Heritage Council of South Africa**



NHC HONOURS HERITAGE CHAMPIONS AT 13TH GOLDEN SHIELD HERITAGE AWARDS



Recipients recognized for contributions to heritage preservation, education, journalism and cultural knowledge.

The National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC), in partnership with the Mpumalanga Provincial Department of Culture, Sport and Recreation, honoured individuals and heritage institutions for their contributions to South Africa's heritage sector at the **13th Annual Golden Shield Heritage Awards (GOSHA)**, held on 25 September 2026 at Emnotweni Casino in Mbombela, Mpumalanga.

The awards recognised achievements across several areas of heritage, including cultural

knowledge, heritage education, journalism and liberation history.

2026 GOSHA winners

The NHC announced the following recipients across the main award categories:

National Living Treasure: Mr John Qhuzulini Sithole

Preferred Heritage Destination: War Museum

Young Heritage Activist: Inako Mateza

Voice of Heritage: Victor Sithole

Liberation Heritage Steward – (Posthumous Recognition): Ms Nokuthula Simelane

Heritage Education: Mpho Letula

Heritage Journalism: Edward Tsume

In the special category, Dr Nokugcina Mhlophe received the **Ubuntu Honour**.

"Being recognized as a National Living Treasure is a reminder of the importance of preserving our cultural practices and passing traditional knowledge from one generation to the next."

Our heritage lives through the stories we tell, the traditions we practise and the knowledge we share with our young people. We must ensure that these traditions continue to guide and enrich future generations." Says Mr John Qhuzulini Sithole.



Delivering the vote of thanks, NHC Acting Chief Executive Officer Advocate Tshepo Maake said the awards provided a platform to acknowledge the work of people contributing to the heritage sector.

“The awards are organised to pay tribute to the champions of our heritage. The 2026 finalists have showcased innovation, resilience and passion,” Maake said.

NHC Chairperson Mr. Sepheu Masemola emphasized that heritage extends beyond preserving the past, connecting people to their identities, sense of belonging and knowledge passed between generations.

“Heritage is far more than the preservation of the past; it is memory, identity, belonging and the knowledge that connects generations,” Masemola said.

He highlighted the importance of languages, traditions, stories, landscapes, sacred places, music, food and craftsmanship in sustaining heritage, noting the role communities play in preserving and sharing cultural knowledge.

“Our local stories are an essential part of our national story. By celebrating them, we strengthen social cohesion and contribute to building a South Africa in which more people can see themselves, their histories and their contributions reflected in our shared national heritage,” he said.

Masemola also called for previously neglected histories to be restored, communities to be supported in telling their own stories, and young people to be equipped to become custodians of heritage.



SITINTILE SECONDARY SCHOOL WINS 2026 HESOP NATIONAL CAMP

Mpumalanga school takes first place as nine provincial finalists explore South Africa's cultural and natural heritage at the Cradle of Humankind.

Sitintile Secondary School from Mpumalanga has won the 2026 Heritage Education Schools Outreach Programme (HESOP) National Camp, which concluded on 2 October at the Cradle of Humankind in Gauteng.

The five-day HESOP national camp brought together nine provincial teams to demonstrate their knowledge of South Africa's cultural and natural heritage through research, documentation, presentations and educational activities.



The National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC), in partnership with the Department of Basic Education (DBE), South African National Parks (SANParks) and the Maropeng, Cradle of Humankind, hosted the national camp from 28 September to 2 October 2026.

Kimberley Technical High School from the Northern Cape secured second place, followed by Kheale Secondary School from Limpopo in third place. Zanempucuko High School from the Eastern Cape finished fourth.

Other provincial participants included Boaramelo Secondary School from the Free State, Tsako-Thabo Secondary School from Gauteng, Namaneni High School from KwaZulu-Natal, Molebatsi Secondary School from North-West, and Soneike High School from the Western Cape.

The programme gave learners an opportunity to explore South Africa's heritage beyond the classroom through field research, observation, documentation, presentations and cultural activities. Participants exchanged knowledge, developed their research and presentation skills, and explored the importance of preserving the country's diverse cultural and natural heritage.

The camp opened with a briefing and orientation session introducing learners to the programme and its objectives. On the second day, representatives from the NHC, DBE, and SANParks delivered presentations on their roles in heritage education, conservation, and protecting South Africa's cultural and natural resources. Learners also shared their knowledge and perspectives.

On the third day, participants visited the Sterkfontein Caves and the Maropeng Interpretation Centre at the Cradle of Humankind. Guided by site visit operator Kenneth Mawete, they learnt about fossil excavations, the preservation of remains and discoveries that have contributed to scientific understanding of human evolution.

The visit provided practical context for the lessons explored during the competition and introduced learners to the work involved in studying and protecting one of South Africa's UNESCO World Heritage Sites.

Lebogang Mathonsi from Sitintile Secondary School said the competition gave learners an opportunity to deepen their understanding of heritage and exchange knowledge with peers from across the country.



“We are grateful to the National Heritage Council and its partners for giving us this opportunity to learn more about our heritage and share knowledge with learners from across the country.

This programme has taught us the importance of preserving our cultural and natural heritage, and we are proud to have represented Mpumalanga and emerged as national winners. We will take the knowledge and experiences gained here back to our community and encourage others to value and protect our heritage,” Mathonsi said.

The camp concluded with an awards ceremony recognizing the nine provincial schools' achievements. Beyond celebrating the top-performing schools, the event gave learners an opportunity to build relationships and share cultural experiences.

Addressing the finalists, Adv. Tshepo Maake, Acting CEO of the NHC, congratulated the learners on reaching the national level. He emphasized that all participants had gained valuable knowledge and experiences through their involvement in the programme.

Adv. Maake encouraged the learners to take what they learnt back to their communities and share their knowledge, becoming young ambassadors for protecting and promoting South Africa’s heritage.

“To our learners, your journey does not end with this competition. You have moved from being consumers of heritage to becoming its ambassadors. The responsibility now rests with you to protect, use and pass on what you have learnt. HESOP is more than an outreach programme; it is a nation-building initiative.” Said Adv.Maake.

HESOP is an annual flagship initiative of the NHC that promotes awareness and appreciation of South Africa’s cultural and natural heritage among school learners.

The programme encourages young people to take an active role in safeguarding and promoting the country’s heritage.

The NHC congratulated Sitintile Secondary School on its national victory and thanked the participating learners, educators and partner institutions for their contributions to the programme.



MAKULEKE ELDERS PASS TRADITIONAL SKILLS TO YOUNG PEOPLE IN HERITAGE INITIATIVE



The NHC and Makuleke Traditional Council collaborated to promote intergenerational learning and preserve indigenous knowledge.

The National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC), in collaboration with the Makuleke Traditional Council, hosted a two-day skills transfer session in Makuleke Village, Limpopo, on 21–22 August 2026, giving young people the opportunity to learn traditional skills from community elders and indigenous knowledge holders.

On the first day, Ms Matanato Ngwaila, the NHC's Preservation and Promotion Coordinator, highlighted the initiative's purpose and outlined the Council's role in preserving, protecting, and promoting South Africa's heritage.

Her remarks framed the skills transfer session as part of a broader effort to safeguard indigenous knowledge and encourage its transmission to younger generations.

The programme brought together elders, traditional knowledge holders and young people for practical demonstrations and knowledge-sharing sessions focused on cultural practices passed down through generations.

Activities included preparing Xitsonga traditional foods and beverages, beading, weaving, woodworking, and a demonstration of the Mhalamhala horn, including its distinctive sound. The sessions gave young participants practical exposure to traditional skills and an opportunity to learn directly from those who hold this knowledge.

These practices form part of the community's living heritage, showing its cultural identity, history and ways of life. By bringing younger participants together with elders and knowledge holders, the initiative aimed to encourage the continued transmission of traditional skills and their relevance in contemporary community life.

The programme also highlighted the importance of documenting indigenous knowledge to help safeguard it for future generations.

The session provided a platform for intergenerational dialogue, allowing young



The involvement of elders and traditional knowledge holders highlighted their role in sharing and sustaining cultural knowledge.

The partnership between the NHC and the Makuleke Traditional Council indicates the role heritage institutions and local custodians can play in supporting community-led initiatives.

The programme aligns with the NHC's work to preserve, protect and promote South Africa's heritage, including living heritage and indigenous knowledge systems.



NHC-FUNDED PUBLICATION DOCUMENTS GEORGE'S DIVERSE COMMUNITY HISTORIES



Muzi FM project leader Siyamthanda Johns

Muzi FM's Heritage Pathways: Voices, Culture and Memory explore the histories of Pacaltsdorp, Thembalethu and Lawaaikamp, using historical research and community narratives to promote heritage preservation and intergenerational dialogue.

Muzi FM has developed Heritage Pathways: Voices, Culture and Memory, a publication funded by the National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC), to document the histories and cultural experiences that have shaped George, Western Cape. The project brings together historical research, oral histories and lived experiences to provide a broader understanding of the city's diverse communities. It recognizes that George's heritage extends beyond its central business district to include the histories, contributions and experiences of surrounding communities.

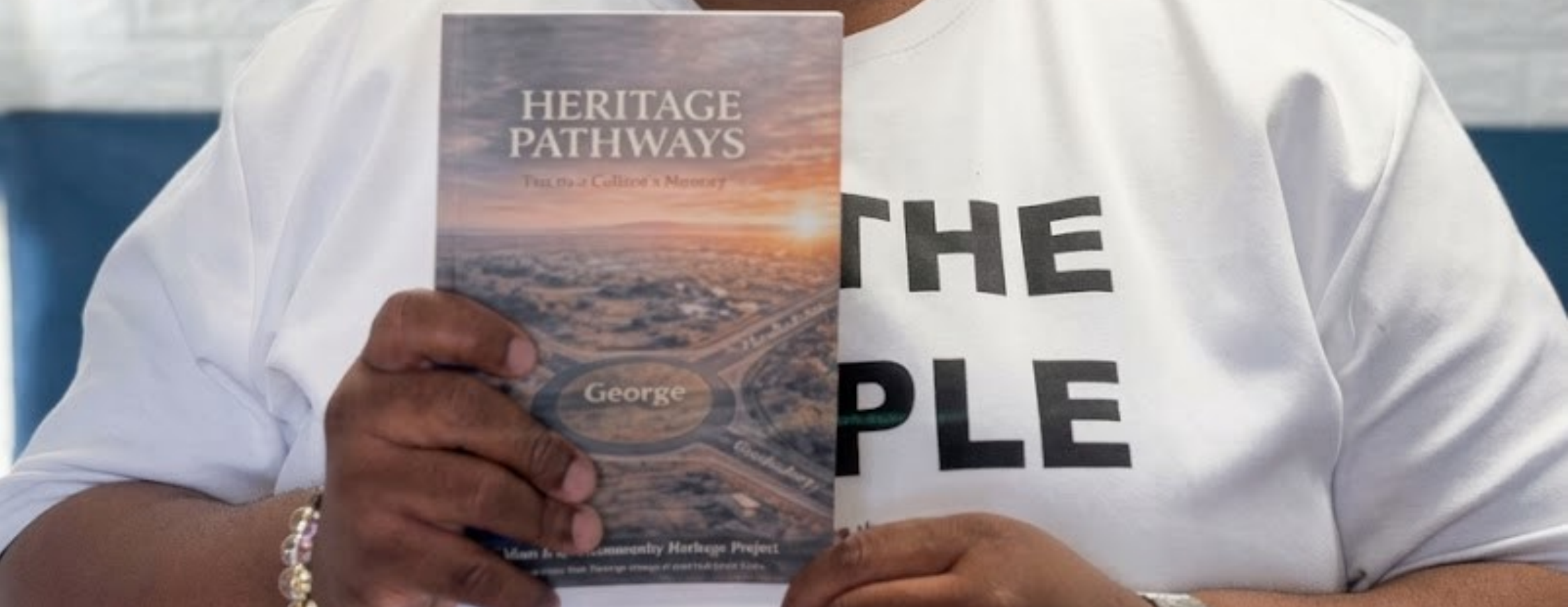
According to Muzi FM, the initiative aims to preserve community narratives that might otherwise remain overlooked and make local history more accessible to present and future generations. The NHC's funding support has helped bring this heritage initiative to life.

The publication explores the histories of Pacaltsdorp, Thembalethu and Lawaaikamp, highlighting themes including settlement, displacement, cultural resilience and social transformation. Through historical research and personal accounts, it seeks to recognise the experiences of ordinary people whose contributions have helped shape the city.

By bringing these narratives together, Heritage Pathways encourages readers to consider how different communities have contributed to George's development and how their experiences continue to influence its identity.

The publication also examines historical landmarks, including the Slave Tree in George's central business district. The landmark provides an opportunity to reflect on slavery, human dignity and historical inequalities. Its inclusion highlights the importance of acknowledging painful chapters of the past alongside the cultural traditions and achievements that communities celebrate.

The project connects local history with broader discussions about reconciliation, inclusivity and national unity. It draws parallels between the Government of National Unity established during South Africa's democratic transition in 1994 and the renewed Government of National Unity formed in 2024.



These periods provide a basis for reflecting on dialogue, compromise and cooperation in a diverse society. The publication emphasizes that unity does not require communities to abandon their cultural identities.

Rather, meaningful social cohesion depends on mutual respect, recognition of historical injustices and opportunities for communities to participate in shaping their shared future. Muzi FM project leader Siyamthanda Johns says the publication is intended to serve as an educational resource and a foundation for intergenerational dialogue.

“Our aspiration is for Heritage Pathways to become more than a publication; we want it to serve as an educational resource, a foundation for intergenerational dialogue and a lasting contribution to community heritage preservation,” says Siyamthanda Johns.

The initiative aims to encourage younger generations to learn about their cultural identities while developing an appreciation of the histories and experiences of other communities. Muzi FM hopes the publication will stimulate conversations in schools, households and community organisations.

Through its partnership with the NHC, Muzi FM seeks to contribute to the documentation and preservation of George’s diverse heritage.

The project highlights the value of recording community memories and making local histories accessible to future generations.

Ultimately, Heritage Pathways: Voices, Culture and Memory aims to strengthen understanding of George’s past and encourage dialogue across cultural and generational boundaries.



YOUNG PEOPLE URGED TO PRESERVE AFRICA'S LIBERATION HERITAGE

Youth academy and historians symposium explore oral history, collective memory and the role of young people in safeguarding historical knowledge. Young people explored ways to preserve Africa's liberation heritage through oral history, historical research and community knowledge at the Youth Heritage Leadership Academy and Historians Symposium, held at Freedom Park in Salvokop, Pretoria, on 2 and 3 September 2026.

Hosted by the National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC), the National Liberation Heritage Institute of South Africa (NaLHISA), Freedom Park and Afreximbank, the event was held under the theme "Developing Young Custodians and Leaders of Africa's Liberation Heritage."

The programme examined the links between heritage, collective memory, identity, nation-building and Pan-African consciousness.

The first day focused on the Youth Heritage Leadership Academy. Participants took part in a historical timeline activity and attended a session titled "Young People as Custodians of Memory," which explored oral-history techniques and the role of community knowledge in recording personal experiences and preserving historical narratives.

The second day featured the Historians Symposium, including a session titled "Reimagining South Africa's Historical Future: Heritage, Memory, Youth and Innovation in a Changing Society."

Discussions considered how heritage can remain relevant as society changes and how younger generations can contribute to preserving historical knowledge.

Speaking at the symposium, Mr Tau Masemola, Chairperson of the NHC, emphasised that heritage should extend beyond monuments, museums and physical sites and remain meaningful in people's lives.

"We do not remember merely for the sake of remembering. We remember for a higher purpose," Masemola said.



He also used a tree as a metaphor for the importance of historical memory: “Memory is like the root of a tree. A tree without roots cannot survive.” His remarks highlighted the relationship between historical memory, identity and how communities understand their past and present.

Boikanyo Moagi, Tshireletso Ngapo and Didintle Mere, from the Rama City Museum Young Historians Club, expressed gratitude for the opportunity to learn from historians and deepen their understanding of heritage preservation. Their participation highlighted the importance of involving young people in discussions about historical research and the preservation of community memories.

The symposium brought together heritage education and historical discussion, providing a platform for young people to engage with historians and consider their role in documenting and sharing the histories of their communities. Through initiatives that encourage oral history, intergenerational learning and youth participation, heritage institutions can support efforts to preserve Africa’s liberation heritage for future generations.





BEYOND CELEBRATION: SAFEGUARDING SOUTH AFRICA'S LIVING HERITAGE

Heritage Month 2026 is a reminder that preserving our cultural knowledge requires sustained community participation, intergenerational learning and institutional support. Heritage is more than a reflection of our past; it is a living expression of who we are, how we understand our identities and what connects us as South Africans.

The 2026 Heritage Month theme, **“Celebrating Our Living Heritage: Strengthening the Ties That Bind Us,”** reminds us that our languages, oral histories, indigenous knowledge systems, traditions and cultural practices remain essential to building an inclusive society. But living heritage cannot be sustained through celebration alone. It must be practiced, protected and passed on from one generation to the next.

Across communities, elders and traditional knowledge holders preserve valuable knowledge through storytelling, indigenous languages, traditional craftsmanship, food preparation, music, rituals and other cultural practices.

This knowledge connects people to their histories and identities. Yet its continued transmission depends on whether younger generations have meaningful opportunities to learn from those who hold it. When opportunities for intergenerational learning diminish, communities risk losing knowledge that may be difficult or impossible to recover.

Protecting living heritage therefore requires practical, sustained action. Elders and traditional knowledge holders need opportunities to share their expertise, while young people should be encouraged to participate in cultural activities, oral-history projects and community-led heritage initiatives.

Schools, families and heritage institutions can help create these opportunities by making cultural knowledge accessible and relevant to younger generations. Indigenous languages must also remain part of everyday life, education and community interaction if they are to continue connecting generations.

Documentation is another important part of this work. Recording oral histories, documenting traditional practices and preserving community knowledge can help safeguard information for future generations. However, documentation should complement, rather than replace, the practice of living heritage. Communities must remain active participants in deciding how their knowledge is recorded, preserved, shared and used, particularly where cultural protocols and sensitive knowledge are involved.

The National Heritage Council of South Africa (NHC) has an important role in promoting, protecting and preserving the country's heritage.

Working with communities, heritage institutions and government, the Council can support initiatives that raise heritage awareness, encourage knowledge-sharing and strengthen the preservation of indigenous knowledge systems. Such partnerships are essential because communities are not merely custodians of heritage; they are active holders, practitioners and transmitters of the knowledge that gives it meaning.



Living heritage also has a role to play in strengthening social cohesion and fostering mutual respect. South Africa's cultural diversity reflects many histories, languages and traditions. Recognizing these differences does not diminish our shared national identity. Instead, it creates opportunities to understand one another more deeply and to build a society in which communities can see their histories and cultural contributions acknowledged.

Guided by the spirit of Ubuntu, we can affirm our shared humanity while respecting the distinct cultural expressions that enrich our nation.

The responsibility for safeguarding heritage cannot rest with one institution or one generation. Government and heritage bodies must support preservation efforts, communities must have the means to sustain their cultural practices, and young people must be given opportunities to learn, participate and contribute.

These efforts should continue beyond Heritage Month through ongoing community programmes, intergenerational learning and the responsible documentation of indigenous knowledge.

Let us move beyond celebration towards meaningful and sustained action. By practising our traditions, supporting our knowledge holders, preserving our languages and creating opportunities for young people to learn from the generations before them, we can strengthen the ties that bind us.

In doing so, we help ensure that South Africa's living heritage remains a valued and active part of our shared future.



UPCOMING EVENTS

**DURBAN (UKZN AND
DUT) - 15TH OCTOBER
2026.**

**JOHANNESBURG (WITS) -
18TH OCTOBER 2026**

**CAPE TOWN (CPUT AND
UWC) - 24TH OCTOBER**



CONTACT US

CONTACT INFORMATION AND FEEDBACK

NHC Call Centre



Telephone: 0127483910

General enquiries



email: enquiries@nhc.org.za

Funding



Email: funding@nhc.org.za

FRAUD/CORRUPTION:

National Fraud Hotline: 0800 701 701



Email Address: fraud@nhc.org.za

FEEDBACK AND CONTRIBUTION:



Email: communications@nhc.org.za



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