

**ADDRESS BY GAUTENG PREMIER DAVID MAKHURA AT THE MAROPENG
WORLD HERITAGE SITE MEDIA ANNOUNCEMENT OF NEW DISCOVERIES**

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Programme Director, Professor Tawana Kupe (Vice Principal and DVC);

Vice-Chancellor of Wits University, Professor Adam Habib;

MEC for Economic Development, Agriculture and Environment, MEC Lebogang Maile and MMC Thabe from World District;

Professor Lee Berger, Professor Paul Dirks, Professor Thomas Hawks and your teams of scientists and excavators;

Distinguished Academics and Students;

CEOs of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site and Gauteng Tourism Authority;

Members of the media;

Ladies and Gentlemen:

On behalf of the Gauteng Provincial Government, I welcome you to the MAROPENG, the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site. Welcome back home. This is your home. This is the home of humanity.

Today we gather here at the rich site of pilgrimage for palaeo-scientific inquiry and world class research which seeks to help us understand our ancestry and the origins of humanity.

The public announcement that will be made by Professor Lee Berger and his team of scientists is truly ground-breaking. It further confirms the position of the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site as a pre-eminent hominin fossil site of the world. It also confirms Africa as the Cradle of Humanity. Lastly, it confirms South Africa's Wits University as the leading global centre of excellence in palaeo-scientific research.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are therefore gathered during Africa month here celebrate three things. Firstly, we celebrate the fact that Africa is the richest continent with regard to raw fossil evidence through which the rest of the world is studying the origins of the humankind. Secondly, we also celebrate the fact that South Africa is a global leader in this field of scientific endeavour. *Homo naledi* reaffirms the incontrovertible fact that Africa is the Cradle of humanity, culture and civilisation. Thirdly, we are gathered here to celebrate Wits University as the pre-eminent African university which is a global leader in palaeo-sciences.

To understand the significance of today's announcement, I would to quote from the Address to the United Nations University in October 2001 in Japan, by former President Thabo Mbeki, on Africa's place in the evolution of the Earth and Humanity:

“One will make bold to say that those of us interested in the history of the evolution of the Earth, have to look at the history of Africa. If we wish to examine the history and the genesis of life, that evidence points to the history of Africa.

And as it is now well established, if we want to look closely into the history of the beginnings and evolution of humanity, that history is also in Africa.

Of course, all these have been corroborated by the rich and unique African fossil evidence. Indeed, nowhere on Earth is there a concentration of fossil records that reveal so much about the Earth, the evolution of life and of humanity, than those found on the vast expanse of the African landscape, especially in the south and east of the Continent.”

Homo naledi was introduced to the world on 10 September 2015 precipitating unprecedented interest world wide in who we are, where we come from and where we are going to. Following the announcement of the discovery of *Homo naledi*, some 3 500 people per day visited Maropeng to view the exhibition.

As the custodians of this World Heritage Site, the Gauteng Provincial Government is investing in the infrastructure of MAROPENG to be able to accommodate more than hundred thousand visitors per month.

It is our dream that with more announcements of new discoveries promised by Professor Lee Berger, the Exhibition and Interpretation Centre will be able to attract local tourists from our communities and educational institutions as well as global tourists, especially from the scientific community.

World class and cutting edge research is very important for socioeconomic development. We must continue to invest in our university system as we transform to ensure diversity and promote focus on national development agenda.

For scientists and ordinary people the announcements which our esteemed scientists will be making today will no doubt add enormously to our existing understanding of our human ancestors and their relatives.

The apartheid government went to considerable lengths to suppress the teaching of evolution for at least two reasons. The first was that the theory of evolution challenged the idea that the world was very young and that species were created in an unchanging form. The second was that the theory of evolution suggested that people shared a common ancestry and that there was therefore only one race of people and that is the human race. The thought that modern humans originated in Africa was not even entertained. Today we know better through great strides in scientific research, such as we see with today's ground-breaking announcement.

In a world dominated by racism, sexism, homophobia, xenophobia and religious intolerance which to conflict, discrimination and inequality, the narrative that we are one humanity is quite profound. We must continuously act against all forms of prejudice wherever and whenever they arise.

The Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site continues to be a source of pride and inspiration to our country and continent. It is probably fair to say that in the last

decade it has produced more world headlines than any other hominin fossil discoveries. All indications are that scientists are going to continue to make dramatic discoveries in this site for many, many years to come.

I take this opportunity to commend the University of Witwatersrand and the team of collaborating researcher led by Professors Lee Berger, Thomas Hawks and Paul Dirks. Professor Lee Berger did assure me after the discovery of *Homo naledi* that more announcements are going to follow. Today he reassured me again that more announcements will follow even after today's announcement.

The new fossil finds are a gift from the Cradle of Humankind World Heritage Site to Gauteng; the people of South Africa; Africa and the world. We thank the scientists for this powerful testimony to human discovery and development. We thank everyone involved for presenting us with this wonderful gift. On behalf of the people of Gauteng, we share it with all of the people of the world, as a symbol of prosperity, collaboration, enlightenment, education, progress and peace.

We celebrate Africa, our continent, as the birthplace of the human species. *Homo naledi* opens another window on the path to humanity.

Thank you.