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## **EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE ON THE 14<sup>th</sup> JUNE 2007 at 10:00am**

14<sup>th</sup> June 2007

### **Press Release on the Renaming of Hendrik Verwoerd Drive and Hans Strijdom Drive**

#### **Background**

At the sitting of its full Council meeting on the 24<sup>th</sup> May 2007, the City of Johannesburg approved the renaming of two major streets in the Randburg area in Johannesburg. **Hendrik Verwoerd Drive** will be renamed **Bram Fischer Drive** and **Hans Strijdom Drive** will be renamed **Malibongwe Drive**. This street renaming process has taken place as part of the Randburg revitalization project, managed by the Johannesburg Development Agency, and is in line with the street renaming policy adopted by the City in May 2004.

Currently five of the main roads in the Randburg area are named after previous Nationalist Party Ministers or senior officials, giving the area the impression of being rooted in the apartheid era. It was therefore agreed to rename two of these roads, to give the area a more representative flavour, and to avoid names which seem to glorify those who led the apartheid regime.

The renaming is one of a number of actions taken to revitalize Randburg. The other interventions consist of improvements to the urban environment, particularly in the Randburg CBD.

The City followed a long participatory process before making this decision. This included the following steps:

- 1) Council approved a process to embark on a street renaming process for Hendrik Verwoerd and Hans Strijdom Drives in 2005.
- 2) In April 2006, JDA representatives embarked on a public participation process including meeting with key stakeholders, advertising for public comment, engaging with the public through the media, street surveys and public meetings, and the submission of written comments.
- 3) Following public comment, Council agreed to change the street names but asked for further public comment on the two new names that were proposed, namely Nkululeko Drive (for Hendrik Verwoerd Drive) and Malibongwe Drive (for Hans Strijdom Drive). 256 written submissions were received at this stage of the process. The majority of submissions (163 in total) argued for Hendrik Verwoerd to be renamed Bram Fischer rather than Nkululeko. Insignificant numbers of submissions were received in relation to Hans Strijdom Drive.

Council therefore decided to proceed with the two new street names (Bram Fischer and Malibongwe). The next step will be to place a notice informing the public that the City has made its decision and will implement it shortly. This notice will be placed during the next few weeks after which signage will be rolled out by the Johannesburg Roads Agency. The streets will be officially renamed around September this year to give the community sufficient time to prepare for the changes.

#### **The new street names**

The proposal to change the name of Hans Strijdom Drive to Malibongwe Drive is related to the emancipation of women and specifically related to the Women's March in 1956. At the march on 9 August 1956, where women were protesting against the pass laws, one of the significant slogans was "Malibongwe!!" which means 'let it be praised'. This meant "Let women be honoured and praised" and not oppressed by the extension of pass laws to women. The

### **Building a better city**

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famous song of that time pays tribute to the bravery of the women who said "Strijdom, you have struck a rock, you have dislodged a boulder, your laws will be crushed." The laws enacted by Strijdom have indeed disappeared, and the renaming of Strijdom Drive is a tribute to the role played by women in the struggle for democracy. The name is also significant in that the street name uses an African language, which is fairly unusual outside of township areas.

The decision to re-name Hendrik Verwoerd Drive to Bram Fischer Drive also has historical significance. During the apartheid era, Hendrik Verwoerd and Bram Fischer represented polar opposites within the Afrikaans community. Verwoerd was the architect of Apartheid, Fischer one of its most courageous opponents. Bram Fischer was the brilliant son of a distinguished Orange Free State family and was born into a life of power and privilege. But he gave these up when appalled by the injustice of apartheid. He vowed to spend his life fighting the apartheid system, no matter what the cost to himself and his family. An advocate by training, Fischer represented the ANC accused at the Rivonia Trial, but he was as involved in the struggle against Apartheid like those he was representing. He devoted his life to anti-Apartheid activity, and paid a heavy price. He endured periods of banning, hiding, and ultimately a jail term. He spent the last 9 years of his life behind bars. Although he had a chance to escape the country during his trial, he chose to account for his activities by asserting the moral imperative of his actions. He and his wife Molly were shining examples of non-racialism and of a deep commitment to justice. There were few as brave as Bram Fischer, particularly in the white community. He is remembered for his courage and his integrity.

Councillor Ruby Mathang, Member of the Mayoral Committee for Planning and Urban Management in the City of Johannesburg, has overseen this process, as part of his responsibility to supervise the work of the JDA, as well as manage the street naming policy of the city. "We are proud to be able to honour those who have given us the freedom that we enjoy today. By honouring Bram Fischer we pay tribute to a rare individual, who put the common good above his own interests. A man who recognized the value of each human being, and who rejected racism in all its forms. We also pay tribute to the women of 1956 who fought so hard to protect their families, and who went on to endure many years of hardship as a result of the extension of pass laws to women. Street names are significant, because they help us to celebrate aspects of our history, and to pay tribute to our heroes. There are very few people in Johannesburg today who would want to pay tribute to Verwoerd and Strijdom."

The CEO of the Johannesburg Development Agency, Lael Bethlehem, emphasized that the street naming process is part of a bigger effort to bring new life to the Randburg CBD. "We need to build an inclusive identity for the Randburg area, by building an environment of which we can all be proud, and by re-thinking key street names so that we all feel comfortable in the area. We are revitalizing Randburg by upgrading the urban environment, and also helping to update the image of the area."  
End.