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1992-05-27

Dr Charles Malan

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[11]

The Secretariat  
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Dear Sir

### HSRC RESEARCH PROJECT ON NATIONAL SYMBOLS

The need for research on the basis on which future decisions about national symbols can be taken, has been expressed by various interest groups. On behalf of the researchers involved, I would like to bring the proposed project to your attention. Please see the draft planning herewith.

Although the research will be based within the HSRC, the project will be a joint venture to which various experts will contribute. The research findings will be screened by our Group's General Manager, Prof. Lawrence Schlemmer. At this stage, we would like to know whether the relevant working group(s) of CODESA

- (a) could indicate whether they feel the research is needed and would like to be informed of the research findings, irrespective of their further involvement;
- (b) have any recommendations concerning the nature and content of the research (in which case we would also continuously like to seek their advice as the project progresses);
- (c) could help fund the project or recommend other bodies to be approached for funding. (Costs could range from R10 000 for exploratory research locally and abroad, to R60 000, with surveys and focus group interviews involved, aimed at analysing the population's perceptions and preferences. A project budget and planning document will be presented to CODESA, based on their requirements.)

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The urgency of the project is obvious, and although we are fully aware of your work load, we would appreciate a reaction from you as soon as possible.

Yours sincerely.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'C. Malan', written in a cursive style.

**CHARLES MALAN  
HEAD, CULTURAL STUDIES UNIT**



## PROPOSAL FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT ON NATIONAL SYMBOLS

(Proposed by Dr Charles Malan, Head of the Cultural Studies Unit, Human Sciences Research Council)

### STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

In view of a new constitution for the country which is to be drafted in the near future, the urgent need for research on national symbols has become obvious. However, in view of the sensitive nature of the area decision makers tend to shy away from it at this stage. Research is imperative for informed political decisions.

The need for research was stressed repeatedly at a workshop, "Towards a National Policy for Monuments, Museums and National Symbols" in Bloemfontein on 18 and 19 March 1992. The workshop was organised by the ANC and attended by representatives from the Department of National Education, the HSRC and a large number of conservation bodies and university departments. Consensus was reached that decisions on future policy and symbols should be taken as democratically as possible and only after a process of consultation and debate by a variety of interested parties.

Research on monuments, musea, memorials, landmarks etc. is being undertaken by institutions concerned with preservation and will therefore not be included in this project. Not only official symbols such as the national flag and anthem should be investigated, but also informal symbols such as geographical names, leaders and emblems.

The proposed project will be largely descriptive and analytic, and not aimed at influencing the democratic and political processes of decision making, but rather at supplying the necessary historical, contextual, heraldic and other information on which informed decisions can be based.

The HSRC has already investigated contextual aspects of national symbols, e.g. during the Investigation into Intergroup Relations, and has the expertise for a more specialized project. The Council does not promote any particular party-political interests and therefore remains neutral.

### 2 OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

- 2.1 To analyse existing and proposed new national symbols within their historical, cultural and other contexts.
- 2.2 To survey representative segments of the entire population for their opinions on existing and possible new symbols and the bases of symbols, such as colours.
- 2.3 To make recommendations regarding the strategies and conditions for decision making processes concerning symbols, also based on experience in other relevant countries, especially in Africa.

### 3 CONTENTS AND AREAS OF THE RESEARCH

- 3.1 Categories of symbols, their nature, functions, heraldic background,



history and contemporary significance.

- 3.2 The position of official symbols within a constitutional context, in comparison with the situation in other countries. Of particular importance is the name of the country, flag, coat of arms, anthem, holidays, stamps and designs for currency. Although other symbols are of symbolic importance, the investigation will not cover in detail the state form, constitution, bill of rights and official languages, as they are already thoroughly being investigated. Considerations regarding particular symbols are listed in a separate document (B).
- 3.3 The meaning and acceptability of particular symbols, tested amongst a cross-section of the population, and taking into account the perceptions and wishes of specific cultural groups.
- 3.4 The role of particular symbols in the process of cultural reconstruction needed for a fair and balanced view of history and equal cultural empowerment.
- 3.5 Ways in which symbols are used and can be made acceptable through democratic decision making processes.

#### 4 RESEARCH PLANNING AND TEAM

- 4.1 The interdisciplinary research will be further planned by a broadly representative Project Committee. They will finalize this preliminary planning, decide on priorities and issues to be investigated, comment on questionnaires and help guide the research process.
- 4.2 The Project Committee will appoint experts other than HSRC researchers to the research team. The team will seek liaison with the State Heraldic Service, the ANC's Commission on Museums, Monuments and Heraldry, other bodies which have information on the area, and community representatives.



## CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING NATIONAL SYMBOLS TO BE INVESTIGATED

### TERMS

Symbol: Something that stands for, represents or denotes something else. Here it will include emblems, monuments, etc.

National: Will refer to those symbols recognised and accepted by the nation as a distinct people, organised as a separate political state.

### THE NATURE AND FUNCTION OF SYMBOLS

A universally recognized symbol such as the cross or the crescent represents much more than a simple sign, such as a stop sign with a relatively fixed meaning. True symbols are rich in meaning and are often ambiguous. They have the ability to inspire, mobilise, unify, express solidarity and identification. However, symbols can function in both a unifying and divisive way; compare the swastika, Star of David and the hammer and sickle. The often emotional debates about the Springbok illustrate that connotations, or associated meanings, can be both positive and negative according to perceptions and experience.

Probably the most important role of a widely accepted national symbol is that it provides a sense of identity, of belonging to a country and a people, because it represents shared values. Even at this stage it is clear that democratic values are widely accepted, even though they are interpreted differently. Christian values are obviously important, with approximately 80 % of the population being Christians. However, universal human rights should also be respected; members of other religious groups should therefore not be offended by e.g. the use of Christian symbols. Symbols should probably reflect the meeting of African and Western value systems if they are to be true to a shared history.

### CRITERIA FOR EVALUATING NATIONAL SYMBOLS

Any symbol with the pretence of being 'national' may also have negative connotations for some people. In order to be widely acceptable, however, it probably should incorporate most of the following characteristics (mentioned here as possibilities to be investigated):

- It should be unifying. Most members of the population should be able to feel that it represents 'our' country.
- It should not be divisive. Although it may reflect the rich diversity of the country and its peoples, it should in no way represent domination and exploitation of any kind.
- It should embody important shared values. Universal values such as tolerance, fairness, equality and patriotism should be easily associated with it.
- It should represent shared ideals and aspirations. It should inspire the people to strive towards peace, freedom, prosperity, security, etc.



- It should be selected in accordance with internationally accepted human rights. In selecting a national symbol, all cultural, religious, language, legal or other rights should be acknowledged.

- It should be an expression of solidarity. No country can function harmoniously without its people sharing in a common nationality, in spite of inevitable divergent group interests within the specific country. The symbol should therefore enable grouping at a higher level, furthering national objectives and strategies.

- It should be representative. No significant part of the population should feel that the symbol does not relate to their history, ideals and values.

- It should be selected democratically. Although it is almost impossible to please everyone, it should reflect the will of the majority of the people but, at the same time not offend other groups.

- It should make identification easy. It should confirm a common South African identity, both for its citizens and within the international arena.

- It should represent a shared heritage. Even if it is new, a national symbol cannot be a-historical. Most people should feel that something of their own history within a shared context is captured by the accommodating symbol.

- It should be able to mobilise. A country should be able to rally its people by means of all-embracing symbols in times of crisis, or to foster patriotic fervour through national achievements.

- It should be completely non-racial. Particularly in South Africa, it is unacceptable to imply any connotation of racial domination or privileging.

- It should not let marginalised sections of the population feel excluded. Its connotations should therefore be non-racial, non-sexist, non-elitist and non-sectarian, and it should in no way antagonise people excluded from power structures.

- It should be worthy of respect. It should have the aesthetic, stylistic, moral, cultural and other qualities necessary to elicit respect.

#### HERALDIC SYMBOLS

Although even totemism is seen by some experts as the forerunner of true heraldry, heraldry has long been attached to that which in earlier times was known as armory, the science of armorial bearings. National heraldic symbols therefore comprise primarily the national coat of arms and its representation in a seal. However, the area of heraldry covers most graphic representation which are used by groups to embody their identity, such as a flag and emblems. These symbols are then registered and described.

To ensure easy identification only a limited number of colours are used in heraldry. These are gold (often represented as yellow), silver (white), red, blue, black, green and purple. Natural emblems such as leaves and flowers, beasts and birds, and fishes, reptiles and insects are widely used.

Heraldic research will be crucially important in designing a national coat of arms and flag (if new ones are needed), although the revered symbols of those sections of the population without a formal Western heraldic tradition should obviously also be taken into account.



## NATIONAL FLAG

The national flag is the property of the people and every individual may have one. Ideally, it should therefore also be easy to reproduce and draw it.

South Africa has had a rich history of official flags of colonies, republics and the Union - some of which are incorporated in the present national flag - as well as flags of diverse movements and parties.

If a new flag is to be designed and the preferences of the majority of the population are to be taken as a point of departure, it is logical that commonalities should in the first place be sought in the preferences for colours. The different heraldic colours have the following universal and local positive connotations (negative connotations are not mentioned):

**Green:** Vegetation; earthly, growing, tangible things, youth, sympathy, sensation, adaptability, Africa's fertile land, hope.

**Gold/yellow:** Sun, gold and wealth of the earth, eternity, air, intuition, illumination.

**Red:** Blood, fire, emotions, passion, life-giving principles, highest power.

**Silver/white:** The moon, peace, purity, innocence, truth.

**Blue:** The sky, the sea, thinking, religious devotion, innocence.

**Purple:** Power, spirituality.

**Black:** The fertilized land, Africa's people, the night.

There is the possibility of including an emblem (a crescent, a leopard) in the flag design, but this may create problems with duplication.

## THE NATIONAL COAT OF ARMS

To date, there seems to be no serious objection to the present national coat of arms - at least not expressed in the media. Although there have been many suggestions for a new flag, the State Herald (State Heraldic Service) has to date received no proposal for a new national coat of arms. The arms and its representation in seals are usually not seen by the people as "their" symbol, but rather as a formal image of state administration used to legitimize documents, money, etc.

## NATIONAL ANTHEM

In the absence of other proposals with a wide support, it seems that there are at present three choices:

- (1) "Die Stem": Some of the main objections by other groups concern the reference to "ware trou as Afrikaners" and the fact that it was written by an Afrikaner within the context of Afrikaner nationalism. It also refers to "die kreun van ossewa"; the ox wagon is an Afrikaner symbol and for many blacks it is associated with imperialism.



- (2) "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika": This prayer has gained wide acceptance locally. It is also the national anthem of Tanzania (named "Mungu ibariki Afrika"), Zambia ("Stand and sing of Zambia, proud and free") and Zimbabwe ("Ishekomborera"). In some circles there are objections to the Xhosa origins of the poem.
- (3) A new national anthem: If this is considered to be an option, a competition or submissions will probably be called for.

#### THE NAME OF THE COUNTRY

Although it has been in use for a long time, the main objection to the name "South Africa" is that it signifies only a geographical delimitation. "Republic" has, within colonial and neo-colonial contexts, a long history of apartheid exclusion for many South Africans. Alternatives to the Republic of South Africa being propagated at this stage are South Africa (without "Republic") and Azania.

#### EMBLEMS

If possible, national or regional emblems should represent something that is unique to the country or region.

**The Springbok:** During the transition to a new political dispensation no other national symbol has caused as much controversy. The Springbok is not only a sport emblem, as it is the national animal emblem and is included e.g. in the national coats of arms. South African troops, who incorporated blacks in their ranks, were known as the Springboks during the two world wars. However, it has the negative connotation for many South Africans of being used for a long time as a sport emblem by then exclusively white teams which then represented the country internationally.

**The protea:** Although it is unique, this flower is linked to the Cape Province. The sweet thorn/Karoo thorn, found throughout Southern Africa, was initially adopted as the national plant, in 1910. However, it is fairly difficult to reproduce as an emblem.

**The yellowwood tree:** This majestic tree is indigenous to South Africa and its wood is highly treasured.

**The blue crane:** This graceful bird is also indigenous and, different from the eagle, is not associated with aggressiveness.

#### PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

The Public Holidays Act of 1910 laid down dates for such holidays in the existing Union. Subsequently in 1925 and 1936 select committees of the House of Assembly recommended certain amendments to the Act such as to declare the first Monday in May, May Day (1925) and 26 December, Labour Day (1936), but nothing came of it. The Public Holidays Act of 1952 placed most of the present holidays on the statute books. At present there are:

- \* three Christian holidays
- \* three "neutral" holidays (New Year's Day, Family Day and Day of Goodwill)
- \* two days that are closely linked to the history of the Afrikaner (Kruger Day, also intended to be "heroes' day", and the Day of the Vow)
- \* a constitutional holiday (Republic Day) and



\* Workers' Day.

Some cultural groups have their own holidays commemorating events of importance to them. Although this kind of commemoration is generally respected, many South Africans feel that holidays such as the Day of the Vow and Kruger Day should not have the status of "national" holidays. The following commemoration days have been identified to be specifically important to many South Africans:

\* Sharpeville Day: 21 March 1961

\* Youth Day/Soweto Day: 16 June (the death of 15 year old Hector Peterson, the first victim in the Soweto uprising of 1976) - now known as Youth Day

\* Freedom Day: 26 June (acceptance of the Freedom Charter in 1955)

\* Women's Day: 9 August (the march by 20 000 women to the Union Buildings in 1956 to protest the pass laws).

#### GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

A rich historical heritage is reflected by many San and Khoekhoen place names (Kakamas, Prieska, Knysna, Augrabies), although these inhabitants have disappeared. Often new, post-colonial governments impose the identity of the new regime by changing city, street, square and other geographical names. Already a number of indigenous equivalents are used for the official names of some cities: iGoli/Gauteng (gold) for Johannesburg, Tshwane (small monkey) for Pretoria, Thekwini (of the bay) for Durban, Mangaung (place of the cheetah) for Bloemfontein, etc.

#### OTHER RELEVANT SYMBOLS

The political process of transition will resolve issues such as the choice of a constitution, state form and bill of rights. However, the symbolic importance of these should not be underestimated, as they also represent values, aspirations and ideals. Apart from the obvious symbolic value of monuments, memorials, musea, buildings and other structures of a national nature, the following are relevant: landmarks and regions of historical significance, leaders and heroes, artists, art symbols, the official languages, etc.



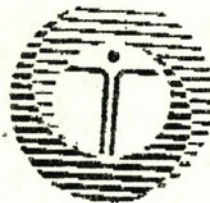
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Verwysing: .....

Page one of  
Bladsy een van .....

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Vir aandag: ..... *The Secretariat* .....

Company:  
Maatskappy: ..... *CODESA* .....

Division:  
Afdeling: ..... Fax number:  
Faksnommer: *(011) 397-2211* .....

From:  
Van: ..... *Dr. Charles Malan* ..... Institute:  
Instituut: *GSD* .....

Date:  
Datum: ..... *27 May 1992* ..... Time:  
Tyd: .....

Message:  
Boodskap: ..... *(The letter will also be mailed to you.)* .....

Projeknommer:  
Project number: ..... *ENN1H* .....

Handtekening:  
Signature: ..... *[Signature]* .....





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Yours sincerely,



**CHARLES MALAN**  
**HEAD, CULTURAL STUDIES UNIT**



## Appendix A

## PROPOSAL FOR A RESEARCH PROJECT ON NATIONAL SYMBOLS

(Proposed by Dr Charles Malan, Head of the Cultural Studies Unit, Human Sciences Research Council)

## STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

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## Appendix B

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The national flag is the property of the people and every individual may have one. Ideally, it should therefore also be easy to reproduce and draw it.

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To date, there seems to be no serious objection to the present national coat of arms - at least not expressed in the media. Although there have been many suggestions for a new flag, the State Herald (State Heraldic Service) has to date received no proposal for a new national coat of arms. The arms and its representation in seals are usually not seen by the people as "their" symbol, but rather as a formal image of state administration used to legitimize documents, money, etc.

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In the absence of other proposals with a wide support, it seems that there are at present three choices:

- (1) "Die Stem": Some of the main objections by other groups concern the reference to "ware trou as Afrikaners" and the fact that it was written by an Afrikaner within the context of Afrikaner nationalism. It also refers to "die kreun van ossewa"; the ox wagon is an Afrikaner symbol and for many blacks it is associated with imperialism.



- (2) "Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika": This prayer has gained wide acceptance locally. It is also the national anthem of Tanzania (named "Mungu ibariki Afrika"), Zambia ("Stand and sing of Zambia, proud and free") and Zimbabwe ("IsheKomborera"). In some circles there are objections to the Xhosa origins of the poem.
- (3) A new national anthem: If this is considered to be an option, a competition or submissions will probably be called for.

#### THE NAME OF THE COUNTRY

Although it has been in use for a long time, the main objection to the name "South Africa" is that it signifies only a geographical delimitation. "Republic" has, within colonial and neo-colonial contexts, a long history of apartheid exclusion for many South Africans. Alternatives to the Republic of South Africa being propagated at this stage are South Africa (without "Republic") and Azania.

#### EMBLEMS

If possible, national or regional emblems should represent something that is unique to the country or region.

**The Springbok:** During the transition to a new political dispensation no other national symbol has caused as much controversy. The Springbok is not only a sport emblem, as it is the national animal emblem and is included e.g. in the national coats of arms. South African troops, who incorporated blacks in their ranks, were known as the Springboks during the two world wars. However, it has the negative connotation for many South Africans of being used for a long time as a sport emblem by then exclusively white teams which then represented the country internationally.

**The protea:** Although it is unique, this flower is linked to the Cape Province. The sweet thorn/Karoo thorn, found throughout Southern Africa, was initially adopted as the national plant, in 1910. However, it is fairly difficult to reproduce as an emblem.

**The yellowwood tree:** This majestic tree is indigenous to South Africa and its wood is highly treasured.

**The blue crane:** This graceful bird is also indigenous and, different from the eagle, is not associated with aggressiveness.

#### PUBLIC HOLIDAYS

The Public Holidays Act of 1910 laid down dates for such holidays in the existing Union. Subsequently in 1925 and 1936 select committees of the House of Assembly recommended certain amendments to the Act such as to declare the first Monday in May, May Day (1925) and 26 December, Labour Day (1936), but nothing came of it. The Public Holidays Act of 1952 placed most of the present holidays on the statute books. At present there are:

- \* three Christian holidays
- \* three "neutral" holidays (New Year's Day, Family Day and Day of Goodwill)
- \* two days that are closely linked to the history of the Afrikaner (Kruger Day, also intended to be "heroes' day", and the Day of the Vow)
- \* a constitutional holiday (Republic Day) and



\* Workers' Day.

Some cultural groups have their own holidays commemorating events of importance to them. Although this kind of commemoration is generally respected, many South Africans feel that holidays such as the Day of the Vow and Kruger Day should not have the status of "national" holidays. The following commemoration days have been identified to be specifically important to many South Africans:

- \* Sharpeville Day: 21 March 1961
- \* Youth Day/Soweto Day: 16 June (the death of 15 year old Hector Peterson, the first victim in the Soweto uprising of 1976) - now known as Youth Day
- \* Freedom Day: 27 June (acceptance of the Freedom Charter in 1955)
- \* Women's Day: 9 August (the march by 20 000 women to the Union Buildings in 1956 to protest the pass laws).

#### GEOGRAPHICAL NAMES

A rich historical heritage is reflected by many San and Khoekhoen place names (Kakamas, Prieska, Knysna, Augrabies), although these inhabitants have disappeared. Often new, post-colonial governments impose the identity of the new regime by changing city, street, square and other geographical names. Already a number of indigenous equivalents are used for the official names of some cities: iGoli/Gauteng (gold) for Johannesburg, Tshwane (small monkey) for Pretoria, Thekwini (of the bay) for Durban, Mangaung (place of the cheetah) for Bloemfontein, etc.

#### OTHER RELEVANT SYMBOLS

The political process of transition will resolve issues such as the choice of a constitution, state form and bill of rights. However, the symbolic importance of these should not be underestimated, as they also represent values, aspirations and ideals. Apart from the obvious symbolic value of monuments, memorials, musea, buildings and other structures of a national nature, the following are relevant: landmarks and regions of historical significance, leaders and heroes, artists, art symbols, the official languages, etc.