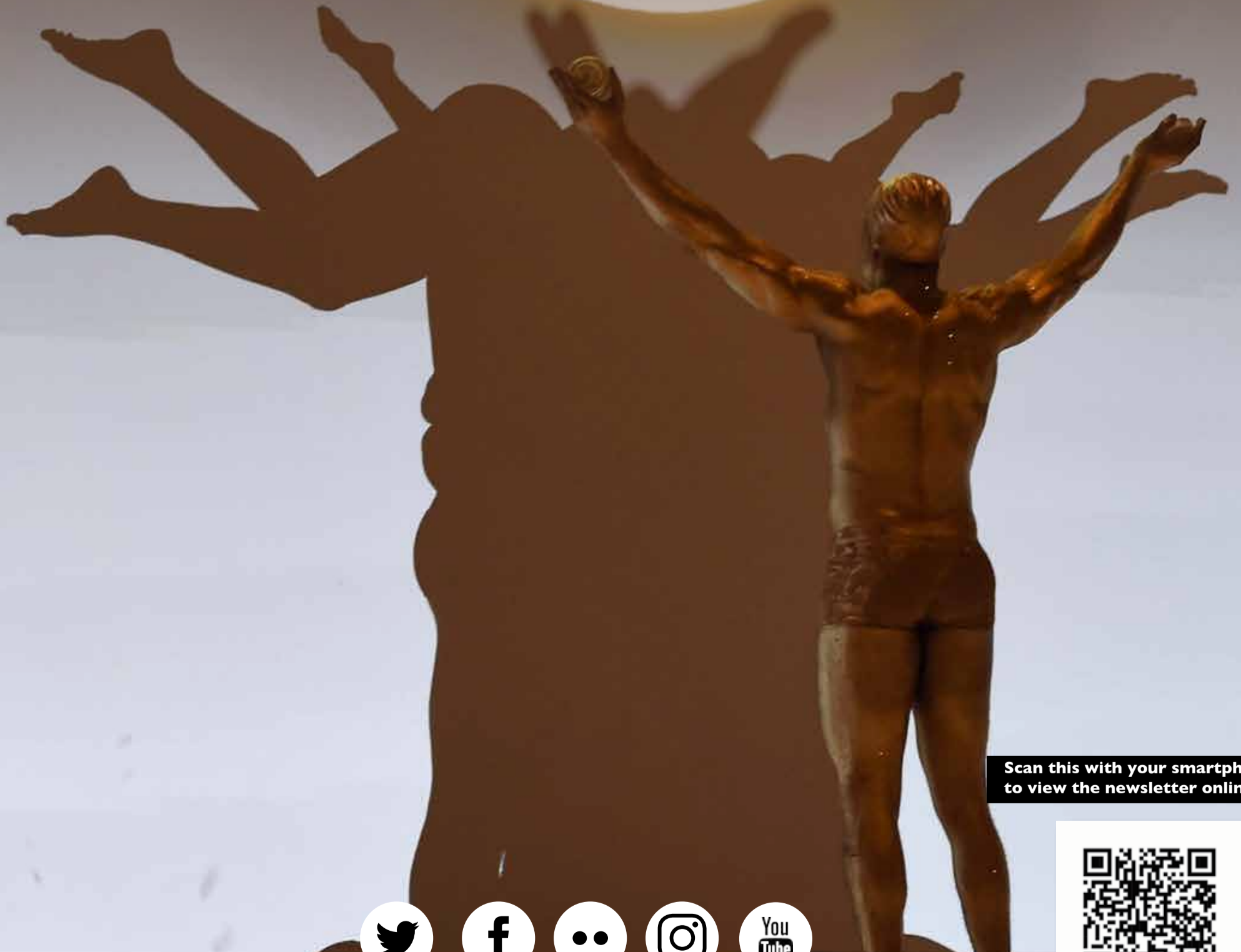


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Editor's Letter

Dear Diplomats,



year. At DIRCO, we kicked off O.R. Tambo's Centenary at the third instalment of the Ubuntu Awards, under the theme "O.R. Tambo ... In His Footsteps". Fhulufhelo Maeba shares her colourful experience at the prestigious annual event, which was held at the Cape Town International Convention Centre on Saturday, 11 February. Also included in this edition is an exciting account of the ceremony in pictures where some extraordinary South Africans such as Winnie Mandela, Caster Semenya, Gertrude Shope, Esther Mahlangu and Siyabulela Xuza, to name but a few, were recognised.

Furthermore, I particularly enjoyed reading Elizabeth Lebogang Mosala's account of the 10 things she likes about her current home, Cuba, which she refers to as a beautiful country with a colourful past. It was interesting to learn that Cubans call the Island "EL Cocodrilo" or "El Caiman", which means crocodile or alligator because the island's aerial view resembles the shape of a crocodile. Read more about what she has learnt from the Cubans about diversity in this issue of *It's Your Voice*.

DIRCO's Employee Health and Wellness and the Sports Council are calling on colleagues to

participate in the various sporting codes available at the department. Make 2017 a year of action and keep healthy by joining one of the sport activities. You will find all the details on how to become a member of a sporting code in this volume.

In *Globe At a Glimpse*, we see the brilliance of the charity work that diplomats engage in as the Embassy in Rabat shares their participation in the International Charity Bazaar of the Diplomatic Circle. Being humble and serving those less fortunate with passion is one of the many ways that we as diplomats can walk in O.R. Tambo's footsteps as these are two of the four values that he lived by. We look forward to a fruitful 2017 as we represent South Africa admirably across the globe. Together, may we continue the legacy of Oliver Tambo by embracing his values, namely Integrity, Humility, Patriotism and Passion.

MM
Mathapelo Monaisa

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My experience at the Ubuntu Awards

By Fhulufhelo Maeba



Saturday, 11 February 2017 was a pleasant evening. An exclusive function, namely the 2017 Ubuntu Awards, was held at Cape Town's select International Convention Centre (ICC). The event was a red-carpet function and well-attended. The occasion was graced by a conglomerate of government dignitaries from a variety of government departments and respective faculties of power. The balance of the audience came from across South Africa. These included men and women on whose behalf this occasion was organised in order to recognise and honour them. The occasion was warm and vibrant. Among the many dignitaries who graced this affair was Hon Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane and Deputy Minister Nomandiya Mfeketo of International Relations and Cooperation; and the Minister of Science and Technology, Naledi Pandor, to name but a few. Members of the Diplomatic Corps were out in large numbers and they were definitely enjoying themselves, along with various sponsors and media houses.

In a moment I will return to this auspicious occasion and the exclusive venue to unpack the entertaining events as they were unwinding and unfolding right before my eyes.

In the meantime, let me add that my prelude to the 2017 Ubuntu Awards began a day earlier, on 10 February, at the airport where I was honoured and tasked with the responsibility to receive and welcome the VIP guests and dignitaries as they arrived and making sure they were being escorted safely to their respective hotels in the comfort of Jaguar cars. On the outside, this task looked simple but in reality, it was a daunting responsibility and a very pleasant surprise to me. I must admit that I have never done anything like this before. Yet, on that day, I was expected to perform the duty live and I was allowed no room for errors. Inadvertently, I must have fumbled and

trembled here and there and almost tripped once. In no time, my composure and self-esteem were restored. Our guests were well received as they arrived one after another until the last as per schedule.

Now back at the ICC. The mood here was cheerful, friendly and convivial. The atmosphere in the hall was filled with felicity and celebration. The Ubuntu Awards were launched in 2015 specifically to recognise South Africans who play a pivotal role in projecting a positive image internationally.

Esther Mahlangu, the 81-year-old woman who refined the BMW 7 series with her Ndebele artistic paintings and who has also collaborated with John Legend to design the limited edition of the Belvedere Vodka bottle for the #MakeADifference campaign, was among the men and women honoured that evening. She won herself the Ubuntu Arts and Culture Diplomacy Award. In her vote of thanks, she pleasantly surprised a number of guests when she briefly expressed herself in French as well. To me she was the highlight of the evening.

uMam Gertrude Shope walked away with the Ubuntu Lifetime Achievement Award while our very own sports darling, Caster Semenya, won the Sports Diplomacy Award.

Radio legend Bob Mabena and the beautiful Claire Mawisa were programme directors for the evening.

Mahotella Queens closed the show on a very high note with their hit songs, seeing young and old doing what they know best, getting down South African style. 🎶



2017 UBUNTU AWARDS WINNERS



Celebrating excellence in diplomacy

2017 UBUNTU AWARDS JUDGES

UBUNTU AWARDS SOUTH AFRICA 2017



Catherine Constantinides



Chichi Maponya



Zandi Nzalo



Thebe Ikalafeng



Thebe Ikalafeng

To see information about the Ubuntu Awards 2017, judges visit: www.ubuntuawards.co.za

SASOL: WINNER OF THE UBUNTU ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY AWARD (AFRICA)



Marcel Mitchelson, Vice President, Stakeholder Affairs, Sasol, is congratulated by a sponsor representative

Sasol now holds the record as the first organisation in the history of the Ubuntu Awards to win in two categories. The Economic Diplomacy Awards are given to South African businesses operating in at least two countries on the continent (Africa) and operating on several continents (Global) in a way that displays good business practice and governance, creates jobs and invests in corporate social responsibility programmes in the countries in which they operate.

Sasol has gone from being just a South African fuels company to become an international

integrated energy and chemicals company with over 200 chemical products being sold worldwide. These products are used in the production process of numerous everyday products made worldwide and benefit the lives of millions of people around the world. This organisation operates in 33 countries and employs over 30 000 people across the globe. Listed on the JSE as well as the New York Stock Exchange, this organisation is recognised globally for its outstanding innovation in the energy space.

PRETTY YENDE: WINNER OF THE UBUNTU ARTS AND CULTURE DIPLOMACY AWARD (YOUTH) – PUBLIC VOTE



The award was accepted on her behalf by her mother and father (picture left and centre) with a sponsor representative from Tsogo Sun

This award was established last year to honour young people in the arts and culture space who have shone on the international stage and as a result made South Africa shine.

Pretty Yende is a world-renowned opera singer from Piet Retief who has worked in London, Milan, New York and Vienna. Representing South Africa on the global stage, she has risen to the top of the opera world with unparalleled speed, having

performed starring roles in the world's grandest opera houses, including the Metropolitan Opera in New York City and the Royal Opera in London. Among her many achievements, she is the only singer to have ever won all the main prizes at the renowned Belvedere Singing Competition in Vienna. She is currently performing in New York. Pretty is a global inspiration, groundbreaker and has truly displayed excellence in her chosen field.

SIYABULELA XUSA: WINNER OF THE UBUNTU YOUTH DIPLOMACY AWARD



Siyabulela Xusa: Winner of the Ubuntu Youth Diplomacy Award

The Youth Award is given to an individual, between the ages of 15 and 35, who through his or her actions, activities and achievements, has promoted South Africa as a dynamic country with an enabling environment for youth to thrive in and contribute to making South Africa and the world a better place.

Siya Xusa has accomplished more by the age of 28 than many have in a lifetime – including having a planet named after him, in honour of his work in developing a record-breaking rocket and creating safer, more energy-efficient rocket fuel.

He is an Energy-Engineering Harvard University graduate with a passion for harnessing the power of the sun for clean affordable energy. One of his earlier projects won gold at the National Science Expo and the Dr Derek Gray Memorial Award for the most prestigious project in South Africa, which led to an invitation to the International Youth Science Fair in Sweden in 2006, where he presented his project to the King and Queen of Sweden and attended the Nobel Prize ceremony in Stockholm.

In 2010, he was elected as a fellow of the African Leadership Network, a premier network of those individuals poised to shape Africa's future over the next 10 to 20 years, consisting of the most dynamic, influential and successful leaders and entrepreneurs in Africa and its Diaspora. In 2011, he was invited to the United Nations and the New York Stock Exchange in recognition for being one of the world's emerging business leaders and to offer strategies for solving the world's energy crisis.

His credibility was further endorsed by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration-affiliated Lincoln Laboratory, which was so impressed by the young engineer's achievement that it named a minor planet after him. Planet 23182, discovered in 2000, is now known as Siyaxuza and is found in the main asteroid belt near Jupiter.

ESTHER MAHLANGU: WINNER OF THE UBUNTU ARTS AND CULTURE DIPLOMACY AWARD (VETERAN) – PUBLIC VOTE



Esther Mahlangu: Winner of the Ubuntu Arts and Culture Diplomacy Award (Veteran) – Public Vote

The award is given to an individual or organisation that has promoted a positive image of South Africa through arts and culture and/or facilitated cultural exchanges between South Africa and no fewer than two other countries for a minimum of 20 years.

Esther Mahlangu is well-known for her bold large-scale Ndebele inspired artworks, MKHARIBO!!! She recently collaborated with John Legend to design the limited-edition Belvedere Vodka bottle for the #MakeADifference campaign, using her Ndebele tribal art style to raise money for HIV prevention.

In October 2016, Ms Mahlangu signed a BMW luxury automobile and made it into a work of art that the public could bid on. The vehicle was on display at the renowned Freize Art Fair in London. This iconic collaboration comes 25 years after she created a BMW Art Car, which was the first to be signed by a woman.



AWARDS SOUTH AFRICA

**BABIES BEHIND BARS:
WINNER OF THE UBUNTU SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AWARD**



Romy Titus (left), founder of Babies Behind Bars, accepted the award

The Social Responsibility Award celebrates the acts of kindness that have been done unto others by South African non-governmental organisations.

Babies Behind Bars, founded by Romy Titus, a South African radio and television personality, is a not-for-profit organisation based in Johannesburg. They look after babies from birth to two years old while they are living with their mothers in prisons across the country.

The organisation has also expanded into correctional facilities beyond South Africa's borders, having managed to assist 14 prisons in South Africa, four in Namibia and one in Swaziland as well as prisons in Mozambique and Kenya. Babies Behind Bars also conducts weekly visits to correctional services with the aim of providing some relief and encouraging health and safety for the children.

**WINNIE MADIKIZELA MANDELA:
WINNER OF THE OR TAMBO LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**

Winnie Madikizela Mandela is known for her constant fight for justice and triumph over tribulation. Her name is synonymous with the struggle for liberation in South Africa and she is lovingly referred to as the Mother of the Nation.

She attended primary school in Bizana and matriculated at Shawbury High School, where she distinguished herself as a person with exceptional leadership qualities. In 1953, she was admitted to the Jan Hofmeyr School of Social Work in Johannesburg. She completed her degree in Social Work in 1955, and was offered a scholarship for further study in the United States of America. However, she turned it down and opted for a challenging position as the first qualified black medical social worker at the Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg instead.

She became interested in politics while working at the hospital. In the mid-1950s, she became involved in the African National Congress (ANC). In 1957, she met Nelson Mandela at the time he was on trial, along with 155 other people, in the now infamous Treason Trial following the civil disobedience campaigns of the early 1950s. They were married on 19 June 1958 in a Methodist service in the Transkei, after which Winnie settled in Mandela's home in Soweto.

From 1962, Winnie was subjected to a virtually uninterrupted series of legal orders, which prevented her from living, working and socialising. She was banned under the Suppression of Communism Act, 1950 for her part in the struggle and was restricted to the Orlando Township in Soweto. She started to work clandestinely for the ANC, which included participating in underground meetings and the printing and circulation of pamphlets.

In 1969, she was detained under the Terrorism Act, 1967 and was placed in solitary confinement for 17 months. In 1970, she was placed under house arrest. She repeatedly flouted this order



The award was accepted on her behalf by her granddaughter, Lindo Zici Mandela

and was charged on a number of occasions. During the 1976 youth uprisings, she established the Black Women's Federation and the Black Parents' Association. She fought gallantly throughout the 1970s and 1980s, undergoing constant harassment, arrest and banishment from the apartheid regime.

Just before the advent of freedom in 1993, she was elected president of the ANC Women's League, a position that she held until 2003. She was voted onto the ANC National Executive Committee (NEC) in Polokwane.

Winnie Madikizela Mandela: Winner of the OR Tambo Lifetime Achievement Award

The award was accepted on her behalf by her granddaughter, Lindo Zici Mandela.

**DESMOND TUTU HIV FOUNDATION:
WINNER OF THE UBUNTU SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AWARD**



Riaan Beukes, pictured on the left, accepted the award on behalf of the foundation

The Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation, housed within the Desmond Tutu HIV Centre (DTHC) at the University of Cape Town, is committed to the pursuit of excellence in research, treatment, training and prevention of HIV and related infections in southern Africa.

The foundation, supported by Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu and his wife, Leah, has been in existence as a not-for-profit organisation since 2004.

The DTHC is an accredited research grouping within the University of Cape Town and is supported in its work by the Desmond Tutu HIV Foundation.

The research, clinical and community outreach staff of the foundation share a common-agreed purpose to lessen the impact of the HIV epidemic on individuals, families and communities, through innovation and their passion for humanity.

Fully self-funded by grants and other raised funds, its shared vision for the future includes the continuation of current TB/HIV-related work of treatment, care, prevention and education, particularly in the most vulnerable populations, while staying abreast of new developments and continuing to contribute to cutting-edge information in HIV and TB public health, social and clinical research.

**GERTRUDE SHOPE:
WINNER OF THE OR TAMBO LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD**



The second Lifetime Achievement Award was awarded to the freedom fighter, stalwart and fierce feminist, Gertrude Shope. Ms Shope was born in Johannesburg, and grew up in Zimbabwe. She was trained as a teacher and when she was 29 years, she decided to join the ANC. Soon afterwards, she left teaching as part of the campaign to boycott Bantu Education. She was the chairperson of the Central Western Jabavu Branch of the Federation of South African Women.

In 1966, the ANC convinced her to leave South Africa and join her husband, Mark Shope, in exile. While in exile, Gertrude and her husband lived in Prague, Botswana, Tanzania, Czechoslovakia, Zambia and Nigeria. From 1970 to 1971, she

was secretary to the head of the ANC's Women's Section, Florence Mophoso.

Together, these two women started the publication, *Voice of the Women*. Ms Shope then became the ANC's chief representative in Lusaka and in 1981, was promoted to head of the Women's Section. She became a member of the NEC of the ANC in 1985. In 1991, Ms Shope was elected president of the ANC's Women's League, a position she held until 1993. She worked together with Albertina Sisulu in convening the ANC's Internal Leadership Corps Task Force from 1990 to 1991. In 1994, Ms Shope became a Member of Parliament in the Government of National Unity.

**CASTER SEMENYA:
WINNER OF THE UBUNTU SPORTS DIPLOMACY AWARD**



Since winning a gold in the women's 800-m final at the 2009 World Championships with a time of 1:55.45, Caster Semenya has not looked back. She earned a silver medal in the 800 m at the 2012 Olympic Games in London – becoming the first black South African woman to win an Olympic medal in the field.

There are few who can dispute that 2016 was Caster's year, seeing her snatch the Gold medal in Rio de Janeiro in the 800 m.

Caster has captured the mind, heart and spirits of people across the entire world. Her determination to triumph against all odds, her sheer willpower and grace in the face of tribulation have made her one of South Africa's all-time favourite sportspeople.

**AMBASSADOR EXTRAORDINARY AND PLENIPOTENTIARY OF THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA TO THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA, TIAN XUEJUN:
WINNER OF THE OR TAMBO EXCELLENCE IN DIPLOMACY AWARD**



The Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, awarded the OR Tambo Excellence in Diplomacy Award to a diplomat residing in South Africa that

has contributed immensely to the upliftment of the South African people over and above the traditional channels of diplomacy.

Celebrating OR Tambo – Ubuntu Awards

The OR Tambo Lifetime Achievement Award is named after DIRCO's patron saint, as he is fondly known.

His efforts in mobilising world support against the apartheid regime were influential in the United Nations (UN) Resolution to declare apartheid a crime against humanity in the late 1970s, thus leading to the expulsion of apartheid South Africa from the UN.

Consistent with the progressive internationalism of OR Tambo, South Africa continues to advocate for the establishment of a rules-based multilateral order that reflects the current global reality and that does not advance the interests of powerful countries at the expense of poorer countries.

South Africa has also taken a firm stance against militarism and imperialist aggression as tools of foreign policy. South Africa's approach to global conflict resolution espouses the principles pioneered by OR Tambo, which stress the primacy of dialogue in settling disputes.

The Oliver and Adelaide Tambo Foundation was established in 2011, with the aim to promote and popularise the legacies of both Oliver Reginald Tambo and Adelaide Tshukudu Tambo. The foundation's mandate is to promote the legacies of these two patriots by supporting and addressing issues of socio-economic upliftment and advancement, education, women and youth empowerment, and the promotion of arts, culture and heritage.

The year 2017 marks an important era as the foundation celebrates Oliver Tambo's centenary. To celebrate his life, the foundation aims to embark on a campaign to promote his legacy, and highlight his values in addressing challenges and aspirations held by both South Africans and citizens across the world.

Minister Nkoana-Mashabane commissioned the development of a work of art by the young artist Setlamorago Mashilo and this was handed over to Linda Vilakazi from the Oliver and Adelaide Tambo Foundation during the Ubuntu Awards.



TEN THINGS I LIKE ABOUT CUBA

BY ELIZABETH LEBOGANG MASALA
SOUTH AFRICAN MISSION HAVANA, CUBA

2. POPULATION



The population of Cuba is estimated at 11,2 million with Spanish used as the official language and only language that is spoken.

3. CLIMATE



Although there are specific months which are referred to as winter, Cuba is generally hot throughout the year. Cuba has a tropical climate with moderate winds. November to April is considered the dry season while May to October is the rainy season. I like the Cuban weather, but on the contrary, Cuba is very prone to hurricanes which I am scared of. However, the Government is well organised when there are hurricane threats and usually imposes a mandatory order to potentially affected areas.

4. ADJUSTMENT TO THE LOCAL CONDITIONS

It was April 2014 when I received a letter confirming my appointment as a Third Secretary: Admin and Consular at the South African Embassy in Havana, Cuba. I had mixed feelings; I was excited because as an HR officer who had worked for DIRCO for eight years then, particularly in an environment where issuing deployment letters was the order of the day, I thought it was about time. On the other hand, I was worried whether I would deliver on my responsibilities as a Third Secretary until I landed in Havana and realised that work was the least of my worries. I then started to reconcile all the sessions that we had with the Employee Wellbeing Centre (EWC) during which they spoke about culture shock! The language barrier, time difference and accepting that at times you will be told that there are no eggs and tomatoes in the entire country were hard but Mr Sello Rankhumise and his wife have made it enjoyable to live in Cuba. I can do with an additional four years.

5. TRANSPORT



Cubans use different modes of transport to commute. Buses are the least expensive mode of transport in Cuba. Tricycles, which are referred to as bici-taxis with the minimum fare of 1CUC (R12,97), which is equivalent to 1USD, are very interesting to travel with in old Havana. Lastly, the old American cars, called "Cuban vintage", are used to transport locals and tourists. Most are well looked after, and one would swear that they have not existed for more than five decades already. I suppose this is attributed to the Cubans' focus on recycling and maintenance.



1. INTRODUCTION



Cubans refer to the Island as "EL Cocodrilo" or "El Caiman", which translates into the word crocodile or alligator. This is mainly because the island's aerial view resembles a crocodile. I refer to it as a beautiful country with a colourful past. A country where I started to realise that diversity was beautiful when embraced. This has had a tremendous impact on my professional and personal maturity as a South African diplomat and thus affected my entire outlook and attitude towards life and the world. Generally, Cubans are vibrant and hospitable people who are full of life and always willing to assist.

6. MEDICAL



There are a lot of doctors in Cuba, and many are frequently appointed in countries in need of medical professionals, with South Africa as one of the beneficiaries. Although it is sometimes difficult to find medication in Cuba, there are numerous hospitals. Cuba's healthcare system focusses on prevention and free health services are offered to all its citizens.

7. MEDICAL PROGRAMME



The Cuba-South Africa Medical Programme, which has been in existence since 1995, remains one of the most unique and interesting programmes in the world, particularly to the South African Embassy in Havana under whose care the programme lies.

Although challenging due to students' diverse needs, it is fascinating to know that my participation and contribution towards this national programme will not be in vain. It will ultimately make an impact and positively contribute towards the capacitation of South Africa's healthcare services which will also benefit me, my family, the community in my neighbourhood and the country at large.

8. EDUCATION

The literacy rate in Cuba is estimated at 98%. There is a compulsory age at which every child has to attend school (five to 15 years). The most interesting of all is the fact that the colour of the children's uniforms depicts their grade level which already conscientises society about the age group when interacting with such learners on the street.

9. SECURITY

Except for a few isolated cases, comparatively speaking, crime levels are very low in Cuba. There is a large police visibility that provides security on the street. In most areas, one can walk at night without being mugged or threatened. This is the most enjoyable part of living in Cuba.

10. LOCAL CUISINE

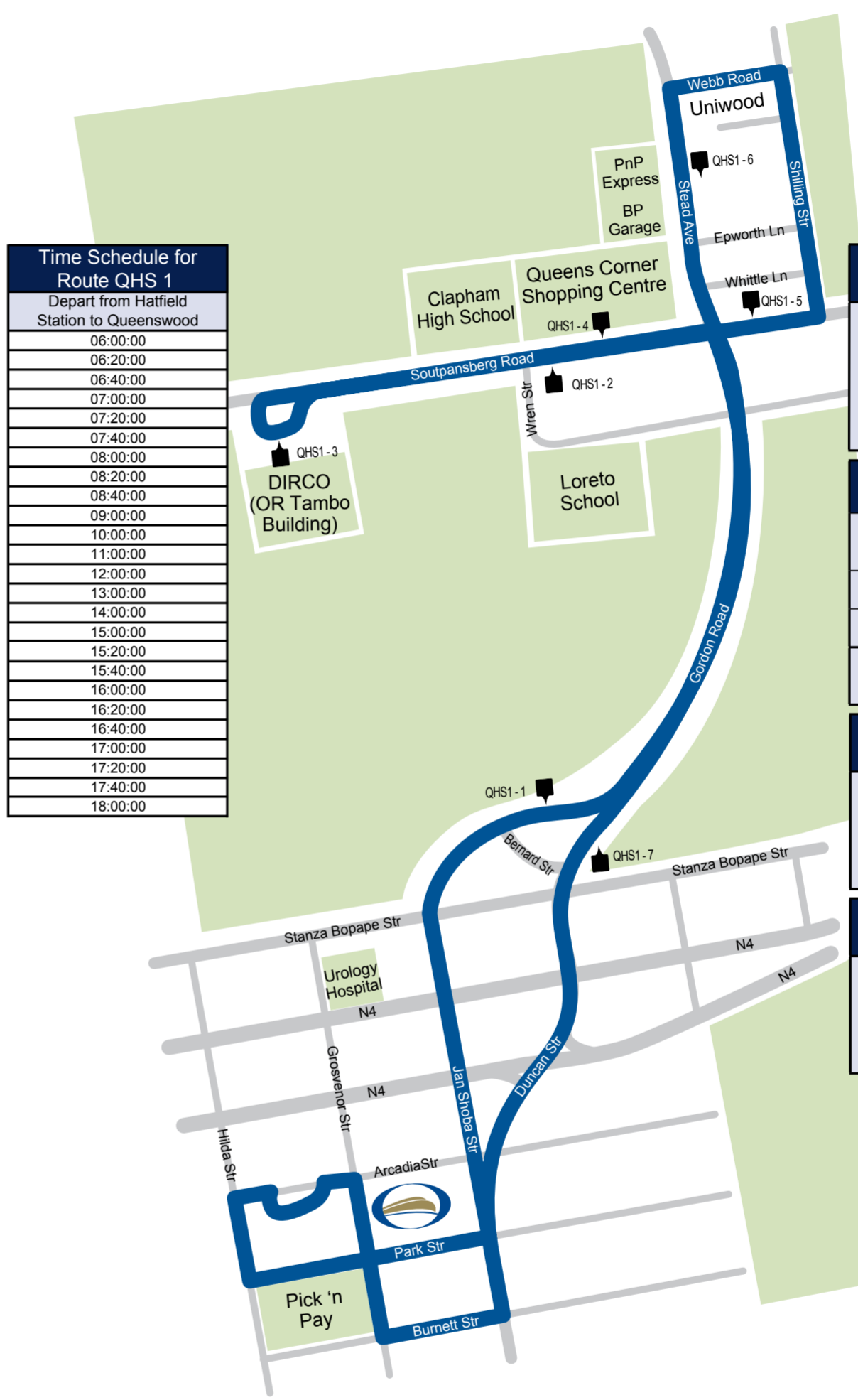


The normal daily diet in Cuba is rather simple: rice, beans, chicken, pork, supplemented by fried plantains and a bit of raw carrot and cabbage.

There is an abundance of tropical fruit such as mango, guava, pineapple and paw paw.

PS: Cuba is a fascinating and unique country and I am excited to learn more about the place. It may just be your destination for your next vacation. See you soon 🌍

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Globe at a glimpse



SA Embassy in Rabat participates in International Charity Bazaar

The South African Embassy in Rabat participated in the International Charity Bazaar of the Diplomatic Circle that took place on 10 December 2016 at the Mohammed V Theatre in Rabat. The bazaar was inaugurated by Her Royal Highness, Princess Lalla Meryem, the sister of King Mohamed VI.

The Embassy organised a stand selling South African products, i.e. handicraft (Zulu love letters, Ndebele dolls and other beadwork, wood work, etc.), textiles with South African prints, South African children's books, cook books and former President Nelson Mandela's autobiography. South African spices, beauty products, wine, Grapetizer and Appletizer, as well as biltong (locally produced) were also on sale at the stand.

One of the spouses of an official baked "vetkoek" with filling and traditional milk tart that were on sale at the international food table.

The products were partly donated by the Embassy, which counted on a budget of MAD5 000 to cover the cost of participating in this event, and it also donated some beverages. Other items were donated by the officials and their spouses. The Embassy managed to generate a surplus of MAD14 426, which were donated to the charity work of the Diplomatic Circle. This was achieved through the high margin generated on products that were procured in South Africa and sold at a premium at the bazaar.

There was a strong demand from Moroccans and international visitors to the bazaar for the South African products, especially the Rooibos



Vibeke Figgins, wife of the Chargé d'Affaires a.i, listens as the wife of the United Nations Development Programme Representative to Morocco, Giselle Poinot, asks about South Africa

tea and soap, bio-oil, South African wine, Grapetizer and Appletizer.

The South African stand, which was staffed with the posted diplomats, their spouses, as

well as the locally recruited staff members, also engaged with the Moroccan and international visitors to promote South Africa as a country with a big and diversified economy, which is open for

investment, as well as a world-class destination for tourism.

Senior officials meetings with Singapore and Thailand

Fourth FOC with Singapore

Ambassador Anil Sooklal, Deputy Director-General: Asia and the Middle East, travelled to Singapore and Thailand as co-chair of the fourth Foreign Office Consultations (FOC) with Singapore on 23 January 2017, and the fifth Senior Officials Meetings (SOM) with Thailand on 25 January 2017.

Both countries are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and are among the key growth drivers regionally and globally. The significance of this meeting came at a time when the world economy and political systems were under massive strain to adapt to a radically changing world environment.

Professor Sooklal paid a courtesy call on Albert Chua, Second Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The meeting served as a general exchange of views on the status of our bilateral relations and developments in the world.

Thereafter, Prof. Sooklal was received by his counterpart, Ng Teck Hean, Deputy Secretary (Asia-Pacific) and Dean of the Diplomatic Academy. Both sides took note of the high-level bilateral exchange between South Africa and Singapore and reaffirmed the sound platform

upon which South Africa-Singapore relations stood.

The last Presidential visit was when former President Thabo Mbeki paid a State Visit to Singapore in 2005, and the late President SR Nathan paid a return State Visit to South Africa in 2007. Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa undertook an Official Visit to the Republic of Singapore from 5 to 7 October 2016. During the visit, Deputy President Ramaphosa had meetings with various Singaporean stakeholders and set the stage for increased economic interactions with Singapore.

Singapore's gross domestic product (GDP) growth forecast of December 2016 indicated that in 2017, Singapore would achieve growth of between 1% and 3%. A poll of businesspersons, conducted by the Monetary Authority of Singapore, indicated that their expectation was that growth would be around 1.5%.

Prof. Sooklal noted the large trade volume between our two countries. Singapore was South Africa's second-largest trading partner in south-east Asia, after Thailand in 2015, with a total

trade volume of R23.5 billion. According to official South African statistics, the bilateral trade volume for the year ending December 2015 was recorded at just over R23 billion (compared to R28,9 billion during 2014).

Preliminary trade figures for January to November 2016 indicated that South African exports to Singapore amounted to R6 billion, whereas South African imports from Singapore amounted to R5,1 billion. These figures are likely to be substantially more after the December statistics are included (based on previous years' statistics).

Singapore is a centre of excellence in the cultivation of skills. Prof. Sooklal noted that the country had been particularly helpful in assisting South Africa with skills development under the Singapore Cooperation Programme sponsored by the Singapore Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Many South African public servants have attended training courses in Singapore over the years, thereby improving the skills level in South Africa.

On the afternoon of 25 January 2017, Prof. Sooklal visited the Civil Service College and

met with 25 South African senior government managers who were receiving management training on leadership in Economic Diplomacy.

During the meeting, Prof. Sooklal noted that tourism was an important component of South Africa's GDP, and that an agreement supporting increased exchanges, and possibly training programmes, should be considered. South Africa saw tourism as a priority sector, and would share a draft agreement as soon as possible. Priority aspects for South Africa would include capacity-building, development of the sector, cooperation within the sector and mentorship programmes on various issues.

Singapore International Airlines with South African Airways as a codeshare partner, already provides direct and convenient connectivity, which supports the growth and promotion of tourism.

Both sides exchanged views on various matters of mutual interest ranging from the developments in ASEAN and the Southern African Development Community. Both sides also agreed to pursue cooperation between southern Africa and ASEAN.

Fifth Thailand SOM

Prof. Sooklal was received on 25 January 2017 by his counterpart, Panyarak Poolthub, Deputy Permanent Secretary of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand. Prof. Sooklal opened his remarks with a message of condolences to the Government and people of Thailand on the passing of King Bhumibol Adulyadej on 13 October 2016.

Both sides noted the strategic nature of South Africa-Thailand trade and investment. Thailand is South Africa's largest trading partner in South East Asia (the second-largest in this region is Singapore). South Africa is Thailand's largest trading partner on the African continent. Total trade between the two countries in 2015 amounted to R31 billion. Imports amounted to R26 billion, whereas exports amounted to R5 billion.

From January to November 2016, total bilateral trade rose to R36 billion, with imports amounting to R29 billion and exports amounting to R6 billion. South Africa had a trade deficit of R23 billion during this period.

South Africa's Ambassador to Thailand, Amb GQM Doidge, reaffirmed his commitment to continue the upward trade trend, but also to inject greater vigour in the bilateral relations. He noted the keen interest from both the Thai and South African business communities.



The meeting noted that South Africa had a clear understanding about Thailand's strategic position in the ASEAN, which is now a single market through the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). This has transformed Thailand into a crucial regional hub for trade and industry, comprising approximately 630 million inhabitants and considered the fastest-growing economies in the world. Prof. Sooklal reminded the meeting that President Mbeki was the first African Head of State to address the Eighth ASEAN Summit in Cambodia during 2002.

The ongoing infrastructure projects in Thailand provide a base for South African exports of machinery, iron and steel as well as mineral products. However, both sides noted that more work was required to open the trade barriers that existed as these hindered South African exports from realising their full potential in bilateral trade. Significantly, the much welcomed decision of Thailand to reopen market access for South African table grapes and the renewal of market access for citrus, were cause for celebration as progress was clearly being marked. In this light, it was emphasised that South Africa and Thailand were both developing countries and that Thailand should have an understanding of the socio-economic effect of the ban on the exportation of agricultural produce.

During the visit, Amb Doidge arranged for a dinner meeting with the Thai-South African Chamber of Commerce which is currently chaired by Ragil Ratnam. The chamber seemed very enthusiastic and motivated to build partnerships across all strategic sectors between South Africa and Thailand. It was agreed that the chamber and the Mission would collaborate on building these partnerships.

Prof. Sooklal was also introduced to the leadership of Thai Airlines, Kritaphon Chantallanon, Vice President for Alliances and Commercial Strategy, who said that the Airline had embarked on a reorganisation exercise, which resulted in the direct flight between Thailand and South Africa being discontinued. However during the discussions, they agreed that they would work closely with Amb Doidge to develop a case for resuming the connection.

During the visits and the consultations, Prof. Sooklal indicated that it was increasingly apparent that there was a keen will to further deepen and expand our relations within the region. The ASEAN nations are increasingly central to global economic policy formulation and must be factored into South Africa's strategy with the broader Asian region.

DIRCO Sports Council

The DIRCO Sports Council, in conjunction with the Employee Health and Wellness, is once again encouraging DIRCO officials to live a healthy and active lifestyle. In this regard, the Sports Council opens an invitation to all interested officials to register or renew their membership for 2017 in the various sporting codes.

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