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MEDIA RELEASE

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MADIBA STATUE UNVEILING DECLARED PALESTINE NATIONAL DAY

The unveiling of a monumental statue of former President of the Republic of South Africa and global icon Nelson Mandela in Palestinian city of Ramallah on Tuesday, 26 April 2016, is to be recognised as a National Day.

This was announced by the Mayor of Ramallah, Mr. Mousa Hadid during a joint press briefing with the City of Johannesburg Executive Mayor, Cllr. Parks Tau in the central West Bank city ahead of the unveiling on Monday.

Mayor Tau described the Madiba statue set to be unveiled later on Tuesday as "a symbol of hope and inspiration for the people of Palestine to realise their freedom".

"Having overcome apartheid in South Africa with support of the international community, it is natural to extend our ubuntu principles as Africans and indeed stand in solidarity with those nations currently experiencing various forms of political and humanitarian unrests," Mayor Tau said.

Mayor Tau is accompanied by the Johannesburg Council's Madam Speaker, Cllr. Connie Bapela and Member of Mayoral Committee for Social Development and Health, Cllr. Nonceba Molwele.

The pre-unveiling press briefing gave the state of readiness to unveil the statue which is a donation from Johannesburg to Ramallah as a symbol of solidarity with the people of Palestine. The six-meter high bronze statue located at the Nelson Mandela Square in the neighbourhood of Al-Tireh is the work of South African artists Tania Lee, Christina Salvoldi and Lungisa Kala. It was shipped to Palestine a month ago.

Mayor Hadid said: "The unveiling is going to be celebrated as a National Day because the statue of Nelson Mandela unites the people of Palestine and South Africa."

The statue has already been prepared for unveiling and its surrounding areas have been revamped to be able to service an anticipated subsequent tourist boom as a result of having the statue in the city. The Palestine State President, Mr. Mahmoud Abbas is also expected to attend the historic event.

"The statue is the first step towards strengthening relations between Johannesburg and Ramallah. We look forward to more steps being taken to enhance this relationship further - particularly as the people of Palestine associate Mr Mandela with hope, freedom and dignity,"

Mayor Hadid said.

"Mr Mandela is to us a symbol of particularly forgiveness, both internally and externally," he said. Mayor Hadid further pledged his support to Mayor Tau on his nomination for the United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Presidency.

"We hope that the Mayor of Johannesburg will lead the world organisation to take us forward. We don't want relations to end here. Ramallah and the people of Palestine have a lot to learn from Johannesburg and the whole of South Africa," Mayor Hadid said.

The unveiling comes after a mission led by the South African Local Government Association (SALGA) visited Ramallah in November 2014. The purpose of that visit was to attend the International Conference of Local Authorities in Solidarity with the Palestinian People. The visit subsequently culminated in the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between Johannesburg and Ramallah on the 23rd of November 2014 in SALGA's bid to promote international city to city relations and collaborations.

A multi-year action plan was also developed to be implemented in support of the signed MOU between Johannesburg and Ramallah. One of the agreed upon action plan elements included the donation of the Nelson Mandela Monumental Statue to Ramallah and the people of Palestine.

The statue holds a special meaning to the Palestinian people as the late President Mandela was a staunch advocate for the Palestinian movement and their longing for freedom and independence. President Mandela was a friend of the late President Yasser Arafat and he once remarked that "we know too well that our freedom is incomplete without the freedom of the Palestinians". These are the same words engraved on the foot of the icon's new statue in Ramallah.

Statement issued by the City of Johannesburg.

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