

Freedom Park Apologises Over Turner Visit

Written by Rudi Prinsloo

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The Freedom Park Trust has apologised for the "rude" and "bossy" treatment meted out to the family of slain anti-apartheid activist Dr Rick Turner in a visit to the memorial.

"This is certainly not how we want our visitors to experience the park," Trust spokeswoman Ilse Posselt said in a statement on Wednesday.

It has also assured the family that Turner's family name has been included in the next batch to be inscribed on the Wall of Remembrance under the struggle for liberation.

In a Business Day column on Wednesday, renowned novelist Ken Follett wrote that Turner's daughter Jann was shouted at by a man with a gun for walking the wrong way in Freedom Park during a visit on Monday to see her father's name on the wall.

"We wished we had not gone," wrote Follett, who is the Turner sisters' stepfather.

He said there was no-one in reception and no guide to the park, only a rude woman who kept asking why they were there and offering them a tour despite their repeated refusals.

"We had to have a guide... he had learned his words parrot fashion. So my stepdaughters, who had lived and suffered through the struggle were given a lecture about it from a man who was not even born when their father was killed."

Follett also criticised the Park's uphill climb and lack of shelter from the sun and said there was "no apparent logic" to the order of names on the wall.

In its statement, the Trust said tours were mandatory at the moment because the park -- including the welcoming and reception area -- was still under construction, with only two sections open to the public.

"The safety of our guests is paramount," said Posselt. "Once the park has been completed, guests will be able to undertake visits to any element within the park without being accompanied."

She said security personnel were being used rather than "the impersonal option of cameras being placed all over the premises".

Guides and security personnel were going through extensive training to add to "the welcoming experience".

Posselt pointed out that while the Park's uphill climbs and winding roads were symbolic of South Africans' arduous road to humanity and freedom, golf carts were available for the disabled and elderly.

Posselt said there were 75,000 names inscribed on the wall with space for 136,000 names as

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future generations added the names of their heroes and heroines.

She said it was "virtually impossible" to categorise the names by date of birth or alphabetically, as the addition of the next batch would disrupt the sequence.

On completion of the memorial, the location of names would be provided by touch screens.

Former president Thabo Mbeki has described the park as a place of hope in which will be embedded the rich history of the country and all humanity.

"It will represent both a transformed landscape and historical memory intertwined," according to a quote on the Freedom Park website.

"It will be a place which will hold our memories in incubation, allowing them to nurture a future free of bitterness, free of hatred, free of stereotypes, free of racism, free of the destructive fury of war."

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