



13 August 2024

To all media houses

A Call for Adherence to Legal Principles and Public Consultation in the naming of “Ngoako Modiba” township

For immediate release:

In a democracy, the process of naming towns, suburbs, and other geographical locations is not just a matter of administrative convenience; it is a reflection of our shared history, culture, and values. The South African Geographical Names Council (SAGNC) recognises this, so it has established clear guidelines that mandate public consultation and emphasise the significance of names. These guidelines are not mere formalities but fundamental to ensuring that place names resonate with the community’s identity and heritage.

It is with deep concern that we learn of the Sol Plaatje Municipality’s decision to name a township after one of its deceased employees, Ngoako Modiba, who, by all accounts, does not meet the criteria outlined by the SAGNC. This individual, hailing and buried in Limpopo, was a municipal employee. Will such a practice be followed for every employee who dies while employed by the municipality? Many have died and never been honoured, so where is the line drawn?

The decision to name a township without proper public consultation disregards the legal framework and undermines the principles of transparency, accountability, and community involvement. It is an abuse of power by some municipal officials, who must be held accountable. The alleged Council resolution is defective in law because the legal procedures were not followed.

The naming of places must involve a thorough public consultation process. This is not a box-ticking exercise but a vital process that ensures the voices of the people who live and work in the area are heard and respected. The community is not just a stakeholder but also the primary stakeholder in this process. Their views, suggestions, and discussions on potential names' historical and cultural importance are crucial and must be given the utmost importance.

Given these concerns, we demand that the Sol Plaatje Municipality immediately withdraw the name until proper procedures have been followed. The naming process must be restarted, with full public consultation and adherence to the legal guidelines set out by the SAGNC. The community deserves a say in how their township is named, and any name chosen must reflect the area's significance, history, and culture.

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