Joshua Nkomo Statue - Zimbabwe Bulawayo



Bulawayo, Zimbabwe's second-largest city and the center of the Matabeleland region, hosts a monumental statue dedicated to one of the most deeply rooted and respected figures in the country's struggle for independence. Known as "Father Zimbabwe," Joshua Mqabuko Nyongolo Nkomo, born in 1917, fought for decades against British colonial rule and the white minority regime as the founder of the Zimbabwe African People's Union (ZAPU). Today, Bulawayo hosts a monumental statue that keeps his name and legacy alive. This statue has become an indispensable stop for history enthusiasts and tourists visiting the region.

Construction and History of the Statue

The bronze statue dedicated to Joshua Nkomo was produced by the North Korean firm Mansudae Art Studio. The process for the statue was extremely painful: The first statue was erected in 2010, but due to the Nkomo family's dissatisfaction with the size of the plinth, it was dismantled and removed before its official unveiling. After intense political negotiations and discussions, the statue was redesigned and officially unveiled on December 22, 2013, on Unity Day, the anniversary of the 1987 Unity Accord, by then-President Robert Mugabe. On the same day, Main Street was officially renamed Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Street, and the Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo International Airport Shopping Centre was opened. In 2018, free Wi-Fi connection was installed around the statue for tourists.

Features and Artistic Details of the Statue

The statue consists of a bronze figure with a total height (including the plinth) of 5 meters, depicting Nkomo in a powerful and sovereign stance. The initial height of the plinth was deemed

insufficient; under public pressure, the plinth was made 3 meters high to achieve an appearance befitting Nkomo's stature and political status. The statue stands at the intersection of Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Street (formerly Main Street) and 8th Avenue, where a statue of the British colonial leader Cecil John Rhodes once stood. This positional choice carries a deep symbolic meaning: the liberator taking the place of the colonizer.

Bulawayo and its Surroundings

The statue is located in the very center of Bulawayo, at the intersection of the city's busiest commercial axis. Bulawayo is Zimbabwe's industrial capital, the heart of Ndebele culture, and a city with a strong historical fabric. The international airport named after Nkomo is an important entry point to the city. Nearby attractions include the National Museum of Bulawayo, the Natural History Museum, and the Khami Ruins (a UNESCO World Heritage site). Semokwe (Lupane district), Nkomo's birthplace, also stands out as a symbolic point of visit.

A Controversial Legacy

The debates surrounding this statue, which could only be erected 14 years after Joshua Nkomo's death, reflect the deep-seated ethnic and political tensions in the country. The fact that the statue was made by North Korea was met with particular anger; as the 5th Brigade, trained by the same country, massacred over 20,000 civilians in the Matabeleland and Midlands regions between 1982 and 1987, targeting Nkomo's supporters. Zimbabwean parliamentarians questioned why Zimbabwean artist David Mutasa was excluded from the contract. Nkomo signed the Unity Accord in 1987, joining the Mugabe government as vice president, and passed away in 1999 at the age of 82. Nkomo's legacy, known as "Father Zimbabwe," means the intertwining of national heroism and a bitter historical memory for the people of Matabeleland.

Visitor Information

The Joshua Nkomo Statue is located in Bulawayo, Zimbabwe, at the intersection of Joshua Mqabuko Nkomo Street and 8th Avenue. Bulawayo, approximately 440 kilometers from Harare, can be reached by plane, bus, or train. As the statue is in a public area, it can be visited free of charge throughout the year. Special events and ceremonies are held around the statue during the December 22 Unity Day celebrations.

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