



**JOINT MEDIA RELEASE ISSUED BY THE
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**SOLSTICE CELEBRATED IN STYLE IN ANTARCTICA AND ON ISLANDS –
AND ABOARD SA AGULHAS IN CAPE TOWN HARBOUR!**

· Minister highlights 45 years of research excellence in Antarctica and surrounding islands

'It is evident that South Africa increasingly recognises the significance of Antarctica in understanding global scientific phenomena.' This was the message delivered by the Minister of Science and Technology, Mosibudi Mangena, at an Antarctica Month celebration event held aboard the SA Agulhas in Cape Town harbour today. The Department of Science and Technology (DST) has declared June 2005 to be Antarctica Month.

Minister Mangena, the keynote speaker at the event, also mentioned the significance of capacity development in research. 'In order for South Africa to address key issues of research in a sustainable manner, all stakeholders should realise the importance of human resource development to enhance our capacity to contribute substantially to global knowledge generation,' he said. Minister Mangena continued to highlight that Antarctica Month provides South Africa with the opportunity to engage the next cohort of researchers among the young people of today.

The celebration event was organised on the eve of the solstice, celebrated on 21 June, in a spirit of solidarity with the nine members of the SANAE 44 expedition team members over-wintering so far from home in Antarctica. True to Antarctic tradition, the team will celebrate the winter solstice, which marks the mid-point of almost three months of polar night, when the sun never rises above the horizon. A festive lunch or dinner is prepared, attended by everyone at the base. Fancy-dress costumes are a popular feature of the festivities, while many bases throughout the continent also hold variety concerts and publish commemorative journals.

A solstice is the time when the sun is vertically above the Tropic of Cancer in the northern hemisphere or the Tropic of Capricorn in the southern hemisphere. When the northern hemisphere experiences its summer solstice (nominally on 21 June), this results in that hemisphere experiencing its longest day of the year while the southern has its longest night.

According to Mr Henry Valentine, Director: Antarctica and Islands in the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEA&T), the international Antarctic community recognises South Africa as one of the leading countries in the field of environmental health and safety management systems.

At this year's Antarctic Month event a tribute was also paid to a group of pioneers – each of whom made history in his or her own way, and who shared their experiences with the gathering:

- Kgaugelo Rampedi was a member of the Gough 44 expedition team for the period September 1998 to October 1999 as one of the assistant meteorologists (weather observer). She became the first black female researcher to spend a full year on Gough Island. She is currently working at the CSIR in the Human Resources Department.
- Gustav Nel has been on 32 expeditions to Antarctica, and holds the SA record for the most summer seasons (x16) spent in Antarctica.
- Marita Cawood was one of the first two female scientists to spend a year on Marion Island. She now lives in Bloemfontein and is busy with a PhD (Department of Agronomy) on the possible mechanism of natural bio-stimulants in agricultural crops.

One of the aims of Antarctica Month is to help the DST to popularise science and to motivate learners to take science as a subject at school. Two promising scientists, Lukhanyiso Vumazonke, and Azwianewi Makhado, used this opportunity to explain how for them, science had opened the doors to a new world. Lukhanyiso participated in several research cruises aboard the *SA Agulhas* to the Prince Edward Islands. During this time he was working on his MSc thesis, investigating the general biology of the sub-Antarctic shrimp, *Nauticaris marionis*, at the islands. Lukhanyiso is an Aquatic Biologist at the South African Institute for Aquatic Biodiversity (formerly the JLB Smith Institute of Ichthyology) in Grahamstown. Azwianewi Makhado worked as a field assistant on

Marion Island. He works at the DEA&T and is currently studying for a PhD.

Antarctica Month is intended to increase the awareness among South Africans of the unique and exciting research done by our scientists on the frozen continent and the sub-Antarctic islands. This month marks the 45th anniversary of the first South African National Antarctic Expedition (SANAE) team to over-winter on the ice. The mission of the South African Antarctic Programme (SANAP) is to increase our understanding of the natural environment and life in the area through appropriate research, science and technology. SANAP research is undertaken in Antarctica, on the Prince Edward Islands (including Marion Island and Prince Edward Island), Gough Island and in parts of the Southern Ocean.

Two government departments are joining hands in managing South Africa's Antarctic initiative. DST, through the National Research Foundation (NRF), is responsible for scientific research while the Department of Environmental Affairs and Tourism (DEAT) takes care of logistical management.

More information is available at:

- www.saasta.ac.za/antarctica
- sanap.org.za

Journalists are encouraged to contact any of the spokespersons on the attached list for more information and some exciting stories. The following young scientists can be contacted for profile stories and role-model angles:

- Azwianewi Makhado (DEAT, 082 796 4630; amakhado@deat.gov.za)
- Lakhanyiso Vumazonke (SAIAB, 046 – 603-5843; 073 247 4311; l.vumazonke@ru.ac.za.)

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