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EDITORIAL

Museum funding — two words which, when considered in the light of the present financial climate, must surely send cold shivers down the spine of any museum administrator. Due to budgets being literally 'cut to the bone' museums in South Africa and abroad in 1986 have to face formidable demands with regard to balancing their budgets and simultaneously continuing to function as educational and scientific institutions. Besides the usual phenomena of freezing all vacancies and drastically cutting research expenditure, these demands have become so serious that some museums abroad have reached the stage where they are even reducing their expert scientific staff.

Also feeling this severe financial pinch, are universities commonly regarded as the major research and academical institutions and in comparison to which museums have always been known to take a poor second place. The reduction in university funding has, in many instances, led to a loud outcry with university spokesmen arguing that universities '... cannot respond to society's expectations for them or discharge their national responsibilities in research and education ...' without sufficient financial support and that they '... would like to see university research as an investment ...' and '... that universities are too important to be left waiting for better times'. Positive reaction from the different governing bodies to pleas of this nature could only mean a considerable re-channeling of the available funds — in other words, for certain institutions to get more money,

others would have to get even less. Were this to happen, museums could find themselves receiving even smaller budgets and the questions of 'Quo vadis, museums?' and 'How can the future of museums be secured?' would inevitably arise.

The answer to this, amongst others, quite simply lies in that which museums have to offer which other scientific and educational institutions don't have, namely **collections** and **exhibits**.

On a world-wide basis museums are undeniably regarded as the only real depositories of a country's past and present cultural and natural heritage. In fact, to constantly build up and maintain relevant collections is one of the major functions of a museum. Without reference collections acting as cornerstones, basic natural and cultural scientific research is stranded. Nothing less than perfection regarding the maintenance, documentation and conservation for long-term use, will ensure that collections of today will be the *scientific treasures of tomorrow*. The same argument applies to exhibits where museums play an essential, ever important educational role.

Let the challenge for museums, in these financially difficult times, therefore be to strive in setting ever higher and better standards with regard to their collection and exhibiting responsibilities, thereby guaranteeing their indispensability in the modern society.



SCHALK LOUW