



INNOVATION WITH INTENTION: DEPUTY MINISTER ZIKALALA CALLS FOR GREEN GROWTH AND GROUNDED COLLABORATION

Article by Fanisa Makhubela & Pictures by Caroline Mokotedi

In the face of rising climate threats, growing infrastructure backlogs, and a construction sector standing at the crossroads of tradition and transformation, Deputy Minister Sihle Zikalala delivered a timely message at today's Western Cape Industry and Stakeholder Engagement Forum, held at the Century City Conference Centre in Cape Town: South Africa must build smarter, greener, and together.

The forum brought together leaders from national, provincial, and local government, academia, public entities, and the private sector. It formed part of a two-day programme, including earlier engagements at the University of Cape Town, where stakeholders shared knowledge and ideas on driving innovation in the built environment.

"We extend a wave of gratitude to all presenters and academics for strengthening collaboration with the Department and its entities," Zikalala said.

The central theme of the forum "Partnership for Technological Progress: Innovative Solutions for a Resilient Western Cape" called for stronger collaboration across sectors to promote sustainable, climate smart infrastructure development.

Zikalala emphasised the urgency of climate change, citing recent flooding in Cape Town and the Eastern Cape that has devastated vulnerable communities. He stressed the importance of linking academic research with local government planning to build climate-resilient communities.

The Deputy Minister outlined also the national infrastructure investment plan, which commits over R1.3 trillion in public infrastructure spending over the next three years. These funds will go toward revitalising rail networks, bridges, roads, ports, water systems, and clean energy infrastructure.

Zikalala emphasised that innovation must be embedded throughout the infrastructure value chain from how projects are designed and procured to how they are built and maintained. He called for the adoption of green building materials, modular construction, water efficient sanitation, and digital solutions, especially in underserved communities where the infrastructure backlog is most severe.

"Innovation is not a luxury it's a necessity," he said. "We must build for both today and the future."

Zikalala concluded by urging closer coordination between role players such as ASA, CIDB, Infrastructure South Africa, and academic institutions to accelerate the shift toward sustainable and inclusive infrastructure systems that leave no one behind.

