

‘Crooks in construction will be dealt with harshly’

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Public works minister Patricia de Lille has issued a stern warning to “crooks” implicated in corrupt activities within the built environment, costing the country billions, that they will be dealt with harshly.

De Lille was speaking at the launch of the Infrastructure Built Anti-Corruption Forum by the anti-corruption task team on Monday alongside the Special Investigating Unit.

The forum was established to monitor infrastructure projects more effectively and put systems in place to detect and prevent corruption.

“Our people need better roads, hospitals, schools and generally better infrastructure for better services. We cannot allow the crooks to continue to steal billions meant for infrastructure.”

The establishment of the forum was in line with the National Anti-Corruption Strategy which was approved by cabinet in November.

De Lille admitted that though the government had in place measures to combat corruption, it could not do so alone, hence the private sector had to be roped in. The forum is

among other bodies made up of representatives from the National Prosecuting Authority, Directorate for Priority Crime Investigation, the Financial Intelligence Centre, Corruption Watch, the Council for the Built Environment, Master Builders SA, the South African Council for the Architectural Profession and Consulting Engineers SA.

“We must work together to put an end to this scourge because corruption steals from the poor,” she said.

Meanwhile, SIU head advocate Andy Mothibi said the construction sector was vulnerable to price fixing, awarding of tenders to non-deserving contractors and issuing of illegal environmental permits for large developers to develop in sensitive environmental areas.

Mothibi said there also was a tendency of defrauding the state through the use of sub-standard construction material to make more profit and facilitate bribery and kickbacks.

Head of Infrastructure SA Dr Kgosientsho Ramokgopa said they had previously worked with the SIU on cases. “We must ensure greater transparency and accountability as we implement SA’s infrastructure build programme,” he said.