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MEDIA STATEMENT

Hon. Premier of the Eastern Cape Province, Lubabalo Mabuyane

King Azenathi Dalindyebo

Deputy Minister of Public Works & Infrastructure, Noxolo Kiviet

Hon. MEC for Public Works, Babalo Madikizela

Hon. MEC for Transport & Safety, Weziwe Tikana

Executive Mayor: Chris Hani District Municipality, Cllr. Wongama Gela

Cllr Siyabulela Zangqa, Mayor of Engcobo

Traditional Leaders

Religious Fraternity

Business people

DG of DPWI Sam Vukela

Colonel Olaf Berg

Officials from various government departments

Goodmorning, molweni

1. “The time for the healing of the wounds has come. The moment to bridge the chasms that divide us has come. The time to build is upon us,” ...these were the words of the father of our democracy, dear tata Nelson Mandela.

2. Today we are indeed doing just that by building bridges to bring inclusion, break divides ad improve access to schools, clinics and economic opportunities for the people in our rural communities.

3. However, we cannot forget that sadly, before these bridges were constructed, many lives were lost, especially children who have drowned trying to cross rivers and indeed those wounds remain for the families who have lost loved ones.

4. But through building these bridges we can ensure that no more grief over loss of life due to lack of bridges and infrastructure to connect communities to services and opportunities.

5. Nelson Mandela also said: “Bridge the chasm, use tolerance and compassion, be inclusive, not exclusive, build dignity and pride, encourage freedom of expression to create a civil society for peace and unity.” End quote.

6. These words speak to the deeper meaning of building these bridges whereby we are working with compassion to promote inclusion, to build dignity and pride through giving people access in a way that does not threaten their lives but instead connects them to the services they are entitled to.

7. **Sakha ibhulorbo ngale dlela sindibanisa abantu** (we build bridges to connect people).

8. Over the past few weeks, I have been haunted by news and images of young children crossing rivers with frightened looks on their faces.

9. These tragedies of children who have lost their lives simply because they were trying to make their way to school should never have occurred.

10. Today, we remember with a great deal with sadness children such as Mbuso Gumede, a grade 1 pupil who just a few days ago drowned in the uMvoti river in KwaZulu Natal.

11. We also remember 7-year old Sinentlantla Nyangiwe who was part of a group of five school children who drowned in March last year in a flash flood making their way home to the Freystate Village across the Mgxonjeni river here in the Eastern Cape.

12. These children had to walk six kilometres and cross three rivers each day to the Popopo School.

13. Their young lives were cut short due to the conditions that sadly still prevail with the lack of critical infrastructure.

14. Right here where we are today, there have been as many as 16 drownings reported in recent years.

15. Death is the most tragic consequence of the lack of bridges but it also shatters dreams.

16. The dangerous journey that children have to make to school means that children often drop out of school, thereby losing an education.

17. Lack of bridges means people can't access opportunities and this continues and perpetuates the poverty cycle.

18. It is truly sad to me that people have died for this democracy and our freedoms and it cannot be right that so many years into our democracy, the lives of children are still being sacrificed while they are trying to get to school.

19. I refuse to hear about delays or to announce projects unless there is budget committed to it. I refuse to accept things the way they are.

20. Bridges are about connecting people, integration and overcoming obstacles and undoing the spatial legacy of apartheid.

21. Bridges are a material structure that can break the cycle of poverty.

22. This is why, at this stage of our democracy where it is our duty as civil servants to respond to the needs of our communities ensure access and dignity, we must do so with urgency.

23. I am pleased that we can finally roll out a programme to build bridges in key areas which experience severe flooding and where there is a great need for this infrastructure.

24. When I first heard about this project a few months ago, immediately said that we must upscale it and do it fast. Khawuleza!

25. This is the instruction from the President but it has always been my mantra because as I always say; the patience of our people is running out.

26. People and especially children have died because they did not have bridges along their route to access education and other services.

27. We simply must roll-out this programme in every province to reach many more flood-ravaged areas and do it as soon as possible.

28. It can never be right that 26 years into our democracy we are still seeing people in our rural areas living without critical infrastructure where it is a matter of life and death.

29. My instruction has been clear to the DPWI team that we must work with the Batho Pele principles of putting people first in mind at all times and especially in this case.

30. This is not only about building bridges, it is about people and providing people with access, connecting people to what they need to prosper and live dignified lives through being able to access a school or a clinic.

31. This National Bailey Bridges Intervention Programme is aimed at improving safe access for rural communities to basic services such as schools, clinics, police stations and other service providers such as SASSA.

32. This project is also about promoting equitable economic growth by providing access to economic opportunities because the lack of connection access leads to increased poverty levels.

33. During the first phase, the National Bailey Bridges Intervention Programme saw the installation of 23 Bailey bridges in the Eastern Cape

including the Mzintlama, Mzimvubo and the Mkamama bridges and one bridge in the Gauteng Province in Hammanskraal.

34. The average cost per bridge ranges between R5 million and R8 million.

35. The demand is determined by input from the National Disaster Management Centre (NDMC) which requested the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) to assist with the implementation of Bailey Bridges Intervention Programme to swiftly respond to the recent flooding disasters which occurred in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Free State.

36. These three provinces were identified as the priority areas due to the flooding, strong rainfall and overall inclement weather conditions experienced in these regions.

37. Technical assessments were conducted by the DPWI and the SANDF in the Eastern Cape and KwaZulu Natal to determine the implementation programme for more bridges to be installed in the two provinces.

38. Following the April 2019 floods in KwaZulu Natal, the provincial government has confirmed a budget of R84.4million for the construction of 11 bridges in the provinces in the Hlabisa, Mtubatuba, Msinga, Mandeni and eThekweni municipalities amongst others.

39. In eThekweni Metro, four Bailey bridges will be installed in the 2020/21 financial year.

40. Teams will be deployed later this month to do installations in KwaZulu Natal.

41. In the Eastern Cape, 13 more sites have been identified for bridges following recent floods in the Alfred Nzo and OR Tambo District Municipalities. The budget for these bridges is still being finalised.

42. In OR Tambo District Municipality for example, eight Bailey bridge will be installed in the 2020/21 financial year. Discussions are being concluded with the provincial government.

43. Teams are also engaging with departments in the Free State while budgets for bridges in this province are being finalised.

44. Climate change brings about severe weather conditions such as droughts and floods, and not only are the storms becoming more frequent but their intensity is becoming more severe.

45. Floods and associated fatalities sadly confirm that the infrastructure shortfalls are critical and need to be addressed in order to provide communities with safe access to schools and clinics and other services they need.

46. A Bailey bridge is a type of portable, pre-fabricated, truss bridge. It is a proven concept that was developed for military use during World War II.

47. The Department of Defence has substantial knowledge and experience in Bailey bridge deployments.

48. A key advantage is that the installation of a Bailey bridge does not require special tools or heavy equipment to assemble, installation is quick and the bridges can be upgraded.

49. It is cost-effective and modular in terms of load and span to accommodate local traffic requirements and pedestrians.

50. The Department of Defence through its South African Army Engineer Formation provides technical expertise to the programme.

51. The provincial governments also play an important role in the implementation of the programme.

52. The construction of Bailey Bridges supports the National Development Plan (NDP) by generating local employment through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) and giving community access to basic services and economic opportunities.

53. The implementation of the Bailey Bridges project will also follow the District-Based Service Delivery in order to break down silos between the different spheres of government to improve performance and delivery in all 257 municipalities across the country.

54. Once I heard about this great project, I requested DPWI to enhance the benefits of the project by training and deploying artisans to construct and maintain the bridges and other government infrastructure.

55. The DPWI used to only be the lead department in the implementation of the programme by providing coordination and Programme Management services.

56. But going forward, I have asked DPWI officials to increase our involvement by investing more through the training of Artisans, young professionals and EPWP participation.

57. This project also has major skills transfer benefits as the SANDF and the SA Army Engineer Formation expertise and knowledge has already brought great benefit to rural communities where bridges have been installed.

58. The DPWI will now also prioritise the skill transfer aspect from SANDF expertise and knowledge to provincial governments to capacitate them to implement the roll out of bridges in their provinces.

59. Artisan trainees will work with the SANDF team for three years. Artisans will learn from the SANDF members in the first year and in the remaining two years, artisans will be given an opportunity to construct Bailey Bridges under supervision of the SANDF and DPWI.

60. Going forward DPWI's Professional Services branch will use this project to provide training during the construction and maintenance of the bridges to artisans and young professionals who have recently obtained tertiary qualifications in the built environment fields.

61. The recruitment of artisans will also be done in line with Presidential District Based Model where artisans will be chosen from all municipalities in the province. The artisan trainees are recruited through Tvet Colleges from District municipalities.

62. Approximately 40 EPWP Participants are also recruited per bridge and are kept with the project for the duration of the construction of each bridge, which is approximately five weeks.

63. While the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu Natal and the Free State provinces have been identified as the priority areas due to the great need, the various teams have started consulting all other provinces to expand the Bailey Bridge programmes across the country.

64. The Bailey Bridges will be funded through multiple sources from all three spheres of government.

65. At the Nkobongo Bridge which we are unveiling today, this site was identified by the community who experienced difficulties crossing the river during the rainy season and where as many as 16 drownings were reported at this specific river crossing in recent years.

66. In October 2019, a team was deployed to commence with the installation of the Nkobongo bridge here in the Engcobo municipality and in 8 weeks, the bridge was completed.

67. This shows us that when innovative, tried and tested methods are used, we can deliver in a matter of weeks and not have delays over many years while communities suffer.

68. The Nkobongo bridge connects the Cobozi and Deberha Villages and connects two wards with several schools such as Phakamani Secondary,

Debera Primary, Mzamoyetho High School and numerous others schools as well as a mobile clinic from the Mjanyana Hospital.

69. In 2018, nine bridge sites were identified in the Eastern Cape and five of these bridges were installed in Lusikisiki, Butterworth, Engcobo and Matatiele. The remaining four are set to be installed before the end of March.

70. The Bailey Bridges will no longer be implemented on an ad hoc basis but the demand has called for a change in methodology to a programme-based approach by expanding the project to be rolled out in all provinces.

71. DPWI has also contacted the Department of Education and has received a high level needs analysis to improve access to schools.

72. Approximately 440 schools require improved access and installing these modular bridges can provide the solution to those access problems and prevent further drownings.

73. In expanding this programme, to complete 400 bridges within the 6th administration, around 80 bridges must be completed per year.

74. Projects will be clustered to ensure speedy execution and efficient delivery.

75. It is up to us to ensure that tragic pictures and stories are replaced with the happy pictures of children and all residents crossing these bridges with a smile knowing that they are safe and they are no longer staring death in the face each day they try to make their way to a school, clinic or to a job.

76. To the community, I want to say that we are committed to doing everything in our power to make sure that we give you access, that we provide you with safe and reliable infrastructure and thereby ensure that you too taste the fruits of our democracy.

77. To all the departments that have worked on this project I thank you and implore you to do everything in your might and never see an obstacle in building this bridges.

78. As we work through delivering in the various areas, let it remain in our minds to cross every bridge we must and to do so fast to deliver this life-saving infrastructure to our communities.

79. Let us work as if it is our own children who are having to cross these rivers every day, think of each child in these villages as your own and let drive us to complete all projects on time as in the quickest way possible. Let's think Ubuntu.

80. Let us go back to the principles of “my child is your child” and make sure that across the country, all residents but especially our children can cross a river safely.

81. Thank you, enkosi, baie dankie and God Bless you all.

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