

**ADDRESS BY DEPUTY MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND  
INFRASTRUCTURE MS BERNICE SWARTS DURING HER ENGAGEMENT WITH  
WOMEN IN THE CONSTRUCTION AND PROPERTY SECTOR, INDABA HOTEL,  
FOURWAYS, 26 APRIL 2022**

---

Programme Director;

Leadership of the Council for the Built Environment (CBE);

Representatives of the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB);

Senior Government Officials;

Social and Developmental Partners;

Members of the Fourth Estate;

Our Most Important Guest: Women in the Construction and Property Sector;

Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;

Dumelang! Molweni! Sanibonani! Thobela! Lotshani! Avuxeni!  
Ndimatsheloni! Greetings to you all!

From his statement from the dock on 20 April 1964 during the Rivonia Trial, Accused Number 1, Nelson Mandela, painted a gloomy picture of life for black South Africans under the yoke of apartheid.

He spoke about the “breakdown in moral standards” and the **“growing violence which erupts not only politically, but everywhere. Life in the townships is dangerous. There is not a day that goes by without somebody being stabbed or assaulted.”**

Madiba points at the migrant labour system, the feminisation of rural poverty, the destruction of the black family, erosion of discipline, and lack of educational opportunities for black children that expose them to dangers and limit their potential.

For twenty nine years since April 1994, the ANC-led government has worked with everyone to create a human-centred, caring society founded on the values of human dignity, equality, and non-discrimination.

We continue through our programmes to undo the apartheid spatial planning, deliver basic services and provide economic opportunities to communities that were neglected by the architects of apartheid and racial segregation.

In spite of our many successes, South Africa still reflect the many challenges that Madiba spoke about before he was sentenced to life imprisonment on Robben Island.

These challenges today are underlined by heinous crimes affecting women and children.

As we meet, we bow our heads in shame to know that we have become a society that murders its own children and mutilate their innocent bodies as we have heard recently about the story of two young boys who were murdered and mutilated in Soweto.

If you are a woman, you will know what we mean when we say “kuyahela” when we refer to birth pains when we learn about the brutal murder of five year old Nqobile Zulu six year old Tshiamo Rabanye.

Our noble struggle for freedom is today put in shame by the violence and murder that children and women face daily not only from strangers, but from their loved ones who should be protecting them.

There is no doubt that South Africa needs to return to the source and embrace the values that honour human dignity, uphold the human rights of women, and above all, support all programmes aimed at restoring the dignity of women through economic empowerment opportunities.

Research tells us that gender inequality and the marginalisation of women in economic opportunities fuels Gender-Based Violence.

As we meet here as different stakeholders in the construction industry, we must recognise that the economic empowerment of women is a necessity and an urgent imperative if we are to succeed in creating a South Africa which is at peace with itself.

In a week where we commemorated 30 years of the passing away of ANC President Oliver Reginald Tambo, we recall how Tambo worked tirelessly to advance the struggles and empowerment of women in the ANC and society.

It was President Tambo who declared 1984 as “**The of the Women in South Africa**” to mark 30 Years of the founding of the multiracial Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) which submitted women’s demands in the Freedom Charter and led the historic anti-pass march to the Union Buildings on 9 August 1956.

In declaring the Year of the Women in South Africa, OR said:

***“The liberation of the land of our birth and all its people will materialise as a genuinely popular victory on the basis of the involvement of the masses, including the women in their millions, as a conscious and active part of the anti-racist and anti-colonial democratic movement of South Africa. One of the fundamental tasks that this process of national liberation confronts is the liberation of the women of our***

***country from the triple oppression on the grounds of sex, class and colour.”***

On the eve of commemorating 29 years of our hard-won freedom and democracy, we call upon the construction industry in our country to honour Tambo and the multitudes of South African women who paid the ultimate price to achieve the vision of a South Africa that is truly united, non-racial, non-sexist, equal and prosperous.

Let us all realise that we cannot build a successful, harmonious South Africa on the foundations of injustice and marginalisation of South African women who constitute more than half of our population.

**Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure (DPWI) is a custodian of the construction and property sector in our country.

On behalf of the people of South Africa, this department looks after the biggest property portfolio in the country, giving us the title of ‘Government Landlord’.

The Sixth Administration under His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa placed our department at the centre of coordinating all government-led infrastructure development with a view of using infrastructure development to stimulate economic growth, create jobs, and reduce poverty and unemployment.

It is in this regard that Cabinet approved the establishment of Infrastructure South Africa (ISA) which is within our department to fast track the delivery of bulk infrastructure, the implementation of catalytic Strategic Infrastructure Programmes (SIPs) and to oversee the successful execution of the National Infrastructure Plan 2050 (NIP 2050).

In fulfilling our mandate, we are determined to make South Africa a construction site to get South Africans working, delivering bulk infrastructure, and changing the face of our beautiful land.

During our term of office, we want to focus on eliminating red tape that delays implementation and completion of infrastructure projects.

We are paying attention to improving contract management, project management, capacitating the state and fighting corruption to ensure that projects are delivered on time and within budgets.

Working with ISA, Treasury, the Development Bank of Southern Africa (DBSA), and other financial institutions, we are preparing bankable projects which will attract investors through Public-Private-Partnerships (PPPs).

Working with sister departments, SOEs, and other government entities, our department will play a major role in the construction of critical water, sanitation, and energy infrastructure.

In line with government policy and our international commitments to reduce our carbon footprint to mitigate climate change, DPWI is playing a leading role in implementing the Green Energy Building concept, the construction of clean energy sources to meet our electricity demands and achieve a just energy transition.

We call on the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) to continue mobilising all stakeholders in the construction sector to pay attention to the emergency of climate change and to ensure that all construction projects contribute to environmental sustainability.

**Compatriots and friends,**

Let us address the elephant in the room.

The construction and property sector in South Africa continues to be a largely male and white dominated industry.

The under-representation of women, black women in particular, in the construction industry remains a global phenomenon affecting even the countries of the global North including the UK and the USA.

It is important that women and social partners in civil society become better organised to fight for the inclusion of women and transformation of the construction and property sector in our country.

A decade ago, in 2012, our country embarked on an important journey when it adopted the Transformation Charter in the property sector.

Over the years, the Property Sector Charter Council (PSCC) has been working with various players in the sector to achieve the objectives of the Broad-Based BEE Act of 2003 and the Department of Trade and Industry Codes of Good Practice on B-BBEE.

We applaud the Council for successfully laying the basis for the development of a code of good practice for the property sector as envisioned in Section 9(1) of the B-BEE Act.

The property sector is a major contributor to GDP and economic growth. The property market in our country is estimated to be around R5.8 trillion.

The 2022 State of Transformation Report for the SA Property Sector reveals that nearly thirty years into democracy, the property sector remains skewed and characterised by racially based income and other socio-economic inequalities.

As you would know, the transformation performance of the Property Sector is measured around seven elements, namely: (i)

Ownership (ii) Management Control (iii) Employment Equity (iv) Skills Development (v) Enterprise and Supplier Development (vi) Socio-Economic Development and (vii) Economic Development.

The report has found that “***black people, black women, and people with disabilities, in particular, are still under-represented in the Property Sector.***”

Access to finance remains one of the biggest challenges to increase the participation of black people and black women in the ownership patterns of the industry.

The report also shows that the property sector missed all the Management Control sub-element targets, and that the female targets recorded the lowest achievements.

At present, the average percentage of black senior management score achieved was 9.51% - it was lower than the set compliance target of 60%.

The report shows that the average percentage of black female employees in senior management score achieved was 0.41% - it was lower than the set compliance target of 30%.

The average percentage of black female employees in middle management achieved was 14.62%- much lower than the set compliance target of 38%.

The average percentage of black female employees in junior management was 23.35%, lower than the set compliance target of 44%.

It is disheartening to note that enterprises in the sector are falling behind their Employment Equity targets, leading to the under-representation of black people and black women.

If black people and black women are not employed in numbers in the property sector, the country loses out on workplace

training and skills development to prepare future black leaders in the sector.

We agree with the Property Sector Charter Council (PSCC) that a dedicated programme must be developed aimed to upskill and recruit black directors, in particular black female executive directors.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The Department of Public Works and Infrastructure is invested in changing the profile of the property and construction industries.

Through our departmental skills and bursary programmes, we are investing in developing artisans, engineers, surveyors, project managers, facility managers, valuers and other skills required to stimulate growth in the sector.

We have a vision of returning to the glorious days when in the past, DPWI attracted the best skills in the country. We will continue to offer experiential learning and in-service training to the students that we sponsor at our TVETs and universities.

We wish to make an impassioned call to the South African youth to see DPWI as an employer of choice and for them to use their skills to benefit the South African industry as a whole instead of emigrating to other countries when their skills are appreciated and needed here.

To the black women in construction, we recommit ourselves as DPWI to use our policies to empower you.

As a department, we recognise that to achieve economic empowerment of black people and black women in the construction and property sector, we need sound policy, a holistic approach, and a commitment from stakeholders in the construction industry.

At DPWI, we are implementing the Property Empowerment Programme which is aimed at addressing the skewed patterns of property ownership.

We have a goal of increasing the number of entities that are majority black-owned and black-managed.

DPWI's Property Management Empowerment Framework seeks to give effect to Section 217 of the Constitution, the Preferential Procurement Policy Framework Act of 2000 and the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003.

Through the policy, we also seek to align to the Expanded Public Works Programme(EPWP), Job Creation and other poverty Alleviation Initiatives.

It is important that women are supported through the entire value chain in the construction industry.

We must work together to ensure that women also participate in the supply of building materials and that their involvement supports localisation and manufacturing.

One of the tools identified by our policy is the Property Incubator Programme.

In this regard, we implore the Department to fast track the implementation of incubation and improve its monitoring and evaluation to get more black women to participate in the construction and property sector.

We can share that the departmental policy seeks to increase the growth of black owned enterprises and cooperatives by achieving some of these minimums:

- (a) Direct procurement opportunities, translate to at least 30% equivalent actual rand value of contracts and

expenditure in the Department targeting black owned and black-managed and controlled enterprises.

- (b) Encourage participation of New Black Entrants and Black-owned start-up enterprises with allocation awards of contracts of at least 20% of all opportunities arising from the procurement of services within the scope of the policy.
- (c) Encourage the participation of Black women-owned, black youth-owned and disabled-owned enterprises with allocation of at least 20% of all opportunities and value contracts which must translate into actual expenditure by the department.

Trough the policy, we also seek to ensure that women-owned enterprises are given the highest priority and preference in the release and allocation of property opportunities.

As DPWI, we have a vested interest in developing and growing the pool of black women landlords.

Moving forward, we will reinvigorate the Transformation Co-ordinating Committee to ensure that there is effective implementation, monitoring, evaluation, and reporting on the transformation agenda of DPWI.

We can assure you that as women in the construction and property industry, you are not alone.

You do not have to pave your road alone.

Failing to support you would be a betrayal of the dreams of the architects of our freedom who envisaged a non-sexist society where women fully participates in the economy.

We again invite you to break new ground as we implement a variety of greenfield projects to rebuild our country.

Some of us who grew up in the rural areas seeing our mothers and grandmothers building mud houses and putting thatch roofs know that women have always been involved in construction.

We saw these women using their pension savings and making bricks to build more durable homes that saved them from constantly patching mud wall structures.

When the women of this country take their rightful place in the construction and property sector, we will not have government buildings that will go to waste or get dilapidated when we have homeless children toiling our streets or abused women without shelter despite the number of safe houses that the state provides to victims of GBV.

We are confident that women will put their heart and all their energies when they build bulk water and electricity infrastructure because it is them who face the challenge of travelling long distances to fetch water or gather wood to make fire to cook for their children.

We invite you to break stereotypes and break ceilings in this male dominated industry.

The opportunities available are multifaceted, and so, we encourage you not only to be industrious but also to pursue life-long learning to master the skills we need to grow and sustain the construction sector.

Please add your voice as women in construction against the criminals who sabotage construction projects and retard our collective progress and delivery of critical infrastructure.

Let this gathering be remembered not as another talk shop.

Instead, let it be remembered as a platform of networking, information sharing, and support to one another in the construction and property sector.

From here, let us forge a lasting coalition of growth and continuous support for all women in the construction sector.

We call on the private sector, development finance institutions, the Council on the Built Environment (CBE) as well as IDT, to prioritise the empowerment of women in the construction and property sector.

If women win, as they surely must, South Africa will ultimately be at peace with itself and the world.

We will again be remembered as the children of the goddess Nomkhubulwane, of the Rain Queen Modjadji, of the warrior-queen Mantantisi or the wise counsellor Makhadzi among the Vhavenda people.

We must in our lifetime end the shame of the violence perpetrated against women not through fiery, well-meaning speeches, but by restoring the black woman to her place of glory so that she can make her contribution in building a South Africa with a more caring ethos.

If we use the construction sector to restore the dignity and glory of the women of our land, we would have honoured the sacrifices of the women of our land who gave up all so that we could call ourselves free.

We dare not linger.

We dare not equivocate.

Let us bring justice to the women of this country so that our children can grow in hope knowing they too have a place under the warm African sun.

Let us roll our sleeves, get to work, and together build a South Africa that works for the women of our land.

**I thank you!**