

**ADDRESS BY THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND
INFRASTRUCTURE SIHLE ZIKALALA DURING THE SAWIC EVENT, DURBAN,
28 AUGUST 2025**

Programme Director,
The Leadership of the SAWIC;
Members of the Fourth Estate;
Distinguished Guests;
Ladies and Gentlemen;

On the first of August 1985, not far away from here, in Umlazi, Human Rights lawyer and community activist, Victoria Mxenge was gunned down by apartheid's killing squads in front of her children.

It was a time of Botha's state of emergency in many parts of our country as the masses of our land drew a line in the sand and responded to Tambo's call to make apartheid unworkable and South Africa ungovernable.

The apartheid regime was determined to fight to the bitter end to delay freedom day.

During the month of August we recall not only our mother Victoria Mxenge, but the multitudes of South African women who paid the price for our freedom.

These were also the women who on 9 August 1956 marched to the Union Building rejecting the diabolical pass laws and told Strydom that, "wathinta abafazi, wathinta imbokodo, uzakufa/ you strike a woman, you strike a rock, you will die."

On an occasion like this during a month dedicated to the honour of women and advancing their heroic struggles, we salute the courageous and heroic women of our land for their sacrifices that gave birth to our democratic breakthrough in 1994.

As we conceptualise and implement programmes aimed at the full emancipation of our country, we recall that black women in South Africa were oppressed not just on the basis of race and class, but also as a gender given the pervasiveness of patriarchy and unequal power relations.

In pursuing the National Democratic Revolution (NDR), the African National Congress has always been clear that it seeks to create a society that is truly united, non-racial, non-sexist, equal, and prosperous.

Soon after his inauguration as Founding President of a democratic South Africa, tata Madiba asserted in May 1994 that:

"Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. All of us take this on board that the objectives of the

Reconstruction and development Programme will not have been realized unless we see in visible practical terms that the conditions of women in our country have radically changed for the better, and that they have been empowered in all aspects of life as equals with any other member of society.”

In this regard, we wish to applaud the organisation, South African Women in Construction (SAWIC), for being a critical voice in the empowerment of women.

Charlotte Maxeke would be proud of you.

The Women in FEDSAW who drafted the Women’s Charter in 1954 would be proud of you.

Isithwalandwe Lilian Ngoyi, Isithwalandwe Sophie-Williams de Bruin, Rahima Moosa, Hellen Joseph celebrate you for taking forward the baton to ensure that women are supported to benefit from the largely untransformed and patriarchal construction sector.

No one is doing a favour or charity by prioritising women’s empowerment in an important economic sector like construction.

We applaud all social partners and stakeholders that are implementing programmes to advance gender equality, and indeed, Generation Equality. Women must not be left behind or ostracised to the periphery of economic activity.

In this regard, we wish to applaud the CIDB for having established the Empowerment and Recognition of Women in Construction (ERWIC) Awards.

Once again, a hearty congratulations to the women who got the accolades recently on 14 August in Sandton.

We will continue to encourage private sector companies to support the empowerment of women as we drive legislative amendments and strengthen implementation of government’s pro-women empowerment policies, especially in the construction and property sectors.

Ladies and Gentlemen, in 2025, our nation celebrates Women’s Month under the important theme, “**Building Resilient Economies for All**”.

The theme recognises that economic development can never be sustainable if it leaves women at the margins of the economy while they constitute more than half of our population.

It is a theme that must challenge us why 31 years into freedom and democracy women, in particular women from our rural areas, remain the face of poverty.

Many women are still economically disenfranchised as they face resistance to transformation and empowerment, especially from actors and organisations in the private sector.

It is for this reason that we must fully support the Public Procurement Act (PPA) which enjoins the whole of government to put set asides for women and other previously excluded groups.

It is for this reason that organisations like SAWIC must lend their support behind our efforts to have one construction industry and drive empowerment through the proposed legislative amendments in the CIDB Act.

As DPWI, we must lend support to the Construction Sector Charter Council which was established to drive Black economic empowerment and the empowerment of women in the construction sector.

When women are disempowered and remain poor, societies create fertile ground for their abuse, including gender-based violence.

Research tells us that gender inequality and the impoverishment of women fuel the spread of STIs, including HIV and AIDS.

And so, our fight against the shameful scourge of GBV and femicide must ultimately be tied to the economic empowerment of women, especially in an important industry like construction which is the backbone of our economy and engine for economic recovery.

Ladies and Gentlemen, our Department is aware of the legitimate outcry from SAWIC and a number of women contractors, that 25 years since the passing of the CIDB Act of 2000, black women contractors still find themselves at the lower grades of the CIDB Register of contractors.

Despite multiple contractor development interventions over the years, the majority of emerging contractors in South Africa remain trapped in these lower cidb grades with limited progression, poor access to funding, and weak post-programme support structures.

We know that systemic challenges include:

- a) **Low progression rates:** Fewer than 36% of contractors in Contractor Development Programs progress beyond their initial grade.
- b) **Payment delays and funding gaps:** These undermine project delivery and contractor sustainability.
- c) **Fragmented** and inconsistent contractor development programme implementation: Infrastructure clients apply different standards, not aligned to a unifying framework.
- d) **Limited post- Contractor Development Program** support: Most contractors receive no structured mentorship or projects access after training.

It is for this reason that my office and the cidb have embarked on provincial roadshows to support emerging contractor.

On 13 June, we took the programmes to KwaZulu-Natal where various emerging contractors, local government stakeholders, state owned entities, civil society etc were represented.

This initiative is designed to support contractors through a focussed approach to development underpinned by the National Contractor Development Framework (NCDF), to which Contractor Development Programs must be aligned.

As you will know, the National Contractor Development Framework seeks to achieve sustainable development and progression of emerging contractors with a particular emphasis on targeted groups, including women and youth.

Development has been given a further boost through the cidb B.U.I.L.D Programme which provides for the B.U.I.L.D Fund, the Enterprise Development Standard and the Skills Development Standard which are implemented on infrastructure projects.

The B.U.I.L.D Programme enables clients to drive development through procurement and is fully compliant with all relevant procurement prescripts and policies.

We insist to infrastructure clients, starting with the Public Works Sector, that compliance with the B.U.I.L.D Programme is non-negotiable.

For the year ahead, R 100 million from the B.U.I.L.D Fund will be used to provide funding for emerging enterprises.

Emerging contractors will also be supported in terms of competence assessment and top-up training.

The process has commenced to target 1000 contractors to be assessed in terms of competence assessment (Assessment of Prior Learning) and 200 contractors for Construction Management Systems Training and Certification so that developing companies can sustain their businesses and participate meaningfully in infrastructure projects.

Compatriots, in July, during my address on the Budget Vote Speech for the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, we highlighted some of the encouraging strides by our entity, the IDT, in empowering women while delivering social infrastructure.

During the 2024/25 financial year, the entity achieved a total programme expenditure of R 3.758 billion of which 93% (R 3.502bn) was on designated groups. Of the R3.502bn expenditure on designated groups, 27% (R945.688 million) was spent on women-owned entities, 25% (R 879.039 million) was spent on youth-owned entities and 2% (R64.645 million) of expenditure was on people with disability.

Through the Contractor Development Programme (CDP), the IDT awarded eighty-seven (87) contracts to designated groups participating in the CDP (39 per cent to women contractors and 40 per cent to youth contractors respectively).

The entity awarded R 4.245 billion (of the total programme contracts awards) to designated groups.

Thirty-five per cent 35% (R1.472bn) was allocated to women-owned entities, and 22% (R938.390 million) was allocated to youth-owned entities. R198 657 was allocated to people with disability.

We also reported that a total of 56 091 work opportunities were created through the EPWP NSS Programme, and 3 561 work opportunities through the IDT programmes.

Through the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP), DPWI has created millions of work opportunities since inception, demonstrating how infrastructure delivery and maintenance serve as powerful levers for job creation.

These projects not only create employment but also transfer skills, stimulate local economies, and improve service delivery across communities.

Ladies and Gentlemen, on the 8th of August, I had the honour of addressing the Built Environment Women in Leadership Seminar in Tshwane, Pretoria.

I emphasised that transformation is not just a government requirement. On the contrary, it is also a moral, economic, and professional necessity.

Given the skills shortages in the built environment, we continue to insist that DPWI, working with all our entities must ensure that the built environment is inclusive, ethical, and representative of South Africa's diversity.

Women remain underrepresented in leadership roles often facing systemic obstacles that limit their career progression.

We therefore commend the newly constituted Built Environment Matters Forum which will assist the CBE in monitoring women's economic empowerment, educational progression, and representation, while addressing policy gaps, advocating for inclusive procurement targets such as the 30% allocation for women-owned built environment professional practices, and promoting gender-responsive budgeting.

We also recognise the Built Environment Women's Network (BEWN), as a platform for mentorship, networking, leadership development, and career support, including access to an online community hub.

As DPWI, we will continue to support the development of women professionals in the entire built environment through the Department's school programme that assists rural and township schools to improve their outcomes in Maths and Science.

In the current financial year (2025/26), 1,300 beneficiaries are participating in DPWI Skills Programmes.

Career expos continue to reach townships and rural areas, raising awareness and broadening access.

We will continue to support these learners who come out of the programme and other young people taking careers in the built environment through the DPWI University Bursary scheme.

Our bursaries cover tuition, accommodation, study materials, and stipends. To date, over 600 students have been supported, with more than R220 million invested.

Our internship programme is key in bridging the gap between academic learning and the workplace.

DPWI's Integrated Work Learning (WIL) programme supports NATED and University of Technology students to complete qualification requirements.

Our Artisan Programme focuses on trades such as welding, plumbing, carpentry, electrical, mechanical, bricklaying, solar installation, and more. It builds pathways for both employment and entrepreneurship.

Through the Young Professionals/Candidacy Development Programme, DPWI provides structured mentorship for registration with professional councils.

In the year in which our nation commemorates 70 years of the adoption of the Freedom Charter, we remain on course to open the doors of learning.

We remain determined to ensure that the wealth of our country is equitably shared as our forebears envisaged when they gathered in Kliptown in 1955 and declared that South Africa belongs to all, black and white.

Once again, we applaud SAWIC for the phenomenal role that it is playing in ensuring that black women also fairly benefit from the dividends of democracy.

This is the least we can do the memories of women like Victoria Mxenge who did not live long to witness the dawn of freedom and democracy because of the brutality and cruelty of apartheid regime.

Malibongwe!

I thank you.

