



2nd EXPANDED PUBLIC WORKS PROGRAMME MUNICIPAL SUMMIT

GALA DINNER

SPEECH: HONOURABLE THULAS NXESI, MP: MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS

VENUE: GALLAGHER ESTATE (MIDRAND)

DATE : ON 03 NOVEMBER 2011

CHECK PROTOCOL

Programme Director

Ministers

SALGA representative

MECs present

Executive Mayors

Municipal Managers

Councillors

Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Public Works,

Members of Parliament Present

Invited Guests

Invited guests

Ladies and gentlemen

Colleagues, may I take this opportunity and extend my warmest welcome to you all - our honoured guests, who have made it to this occasion after a long day of deliberations in the Summit. I trust that your engagements in the commissions were fruitful, and I look forward to hearing the report-backs to plenary tomorrow.

I cannot over-emphasize the importance of the work you are doing here. In reviewing and strengthening the implementation of the Expanded Public Works Programme you are striving to improve service delivery to the most vulnerable and disadvantaged communities. You are at the cutting edge of the flagship programme of the Department and of government – which has prioritised the fight against unemployment and poverty.

In this Gala dinner, we are celebrating the good work that we do as government and the public service. We have said that we are on the right road. We have created thousands of work opportunities. We have improved the delivery of services to vulnerable communities and we have begun to make a difference in poor communities through the Expanded Public Works Programme.

May I just concede some of the points made by the Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Public Works, particularly the criticism that rural participants receive lower remuneration than their municipal counterparts. We need to review this. Whilst some things may be more expensive in town, in general – my experience has been that prices are higher in the rural shops than in the supermarket in town.

May I also take this opportunity and really commend all the municipalities and the implementing bodies of this programme for their contribution in making this programme a success, and urge their continued support.

Indeed, together we can do more.

This Summit is my first public engagement as the new Minister of Public Works, and so what I can say is limited. I have said that currently I am engaged on a listening campaign. The most important thing I can do at the moment is consult, read and make my own investigations – to begin to identify the issues and priorities.

But clearly colleagues it was very disappointing to open the newspapers today and read that another lease scandal is about to hit Public Works. Naturally I have instructed my officials to investigate and provide me with a full briefing. On the specifics of this case, I will not comment further until I have the facts before me.

But let me make some general comments about corruption in public life:

- First, corruption undermines the public's trust in the institutions of government.
- It also represents a massive betrayal of our people – particularly the poor. Let's be clear here. When you defraud government, you are defrauding the poor – you are robbing the hungry and those in need.
- Public corruption is also hugely demoralising for all those honest, hard-working public servants who do try to make a difference.

As a politician, I would have to say that these tenderpreneurs are undermining our national democratic revolution – for which so many struggled and suffered. And as Minister of Public Works I am saying that it is my first duty and task to get to the bottom of these allegations and deal directly with corruption wherever it arises.

I am not saying it is going to be easy. And I am not saying that we will address the challenges overnight. But I am saying that I am committed to this Department of Public Works – and I am determined to root out malpractice. I give you my word on this.

Let me pause there programme director. Sometimes we have to deal with serious issues colleagues. But this is a Gala dinner, so let me leave you with a nice story.

We have talked about accountability, and I have said that accountability goes a long way in addressing the challenges we face. But accountability is not a new concept. Two thousand years ago the Romans knew all about accountability – and in relation to public works I might add.

The story is told that the ancient Romans had a tradition: whenever one of their engineers constructed an arch, as the capstone was hoisted into place – *that's the*

central block of stone which keeps the arch in place – as the capstone was hoisted into place, the engineer assumed accountability for his work in the most profound way possible:he stood under the arch.

Now I want to assure all the engineers and other professionals who work for the Department that there are no plans in place to emulate the ancient Romans.

Tomorrow will be the last day of this Summit. Your task then is to implement the commitments you made here in the last two days. I wish you well in your endeavours and I hope to be able to visit at least some of you, on the ground, during the next year.

I look forward to working with you all.

I thank you