

The Deputy Minister of Public Works, Mr Ntopile Kganyago, turns the sod for the establishment of the High Court at Polokwane, Limpopo Province

Date: 11 March 2005
Venue: Polokwane, Limpopo Province

- The MEC for Public Works in Limpopo, Mr. Thaba Mufamadi
- The Mayor of Capricorn District Municipality, Mr. D Monakedi
- The Mayor of Polokwane Municipality, Mr. Thabo Makunyane
- The Regional Manager of the National Department of Public Works, Mr. Thomas Dzivhani
- Senior government officials
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

In 2000, we visited Limpopo to turn the sod and lay a foundation brick for the construction of the Kutama-Sinthumule Maximum Security Prison at Makhado. Two years later and after a total investment of more than R500 million, we returned to the province at the invitation of the client department, Correctional Services, to officially open the precinct. This means that we are no strangers to the people of the province instead we have become partners in public service delivery and development.

In the past ten years up to April 2004, the National Department of Public Works has planned and implemented more than seven thousand and six hundred (7600) construction projects worth approximately R10 billion on behalf other national government departments.

This is a fitting tribute to the contribution made by this Department to the social and economic transformation of South Africa in the last ten years of freedom and democracy.

As its core function, the National Department of Public Works acquires, maintains and manages fixed properties of the state, on behalf of the state and its departments. This includes structures such as magistrate courts, police stations, prisons and military bases. In fact, the SAPS, Correctional Services, Justice and Defence constitute our top four clients and between the four of them, account for more than 82% of the seven thousand and six hundred projects we mentioned above. In the same period, the Department implemented almost eleven hundred projects (1085) on behalf of the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.

Government has prioritised public service delivery. And in support of that, the National Department of Public Works uses its core competency of infrastructure development to acquire essential public buildings to facilitate service delivery and alleviate poverty. Whereas prior to 1994 public infrastructure such as police stations, prisons and courts were nothing but symbols of repression to suppress those holding different ideologies, since 1994 the current government has transformed these institutions into beacons of law and order, safety and security, justice and governance, to protect the rights of the law abiding citizens.

In the same vein, government has taken a conscious decision to establish many of these centres closer to the communities they serve to give the people unhindered access to essential services at a lesser cost to them.

The construction and subsequent opening of the thirty million rand (R30 million) magistrate courts at Khayelitsha near Cape Town and the thirty nine million rand (R39 million) at Tembisa outside Kempton Park in Gauteng, are indicative of the government's resolve to increase fixed capital investment in these formerly neglected areas meanwhile alleviating poverty by eliminating geographical distance between the people and the centres of government. This is also in support of government work ethic as encapsulated in the Batho Pele principles which emphasize the right of access to those services and goods critical to the development and empowerment of the previously neglected communities. The construction of the Multi Purpose Community Centres by Public Works on behalf of Government Communication and Information Service (GCIS) in many rural areas as well as the establishment of the Multi Sectoral Community Safety Centres in most provinces should be viewed against this effort to bring essential services to the people.

In addition to the Tembisa Magistrate Court, the National Department of Public Works in 2004 handed over the one hundred and nine million rand (R109 million) Port Elizabeth Magistrate Court to Justice following its upgrading and renovations. Not far from the same project, the Department of Public Works participated in the sod turning ceremony for the construction of a Magistrate Court and a Police Station complex at a total cost of nearly forty million rand (R38, 9 million) at Motherwell.

Today we meet to break the ground here at the site of the Old Magistrate building in Polokwane as a sign of a commitment to build the R8, 8 million High Court on behalf of our client, the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development.

The High Court, I am informed, is currently located further north, at Thohoyandou and that the Justice Department has taken a decision to establish it in Polokwane, initially as a permanent circuit court but with a potential to evolve into a Local Division court and eventually to a Provincial Division.

The project to establish the High Court in Polokwane has been long in the planning before it was transferred to the Polokwane Regional Office of the National Department of Public Works in January 2004 following the devolution of functions from Head Office to the Regional Offices in October 2003. The project constitutes the upgrading and refurbishment of the two wings of the Old Magistrate Office. These wings were built in 1994 and 1998, respectively and are currently vacant. Their upgrading must be, and will be, consistent with the specifications as laid down by the client i.e. Department of Justice.

Upon completion, the High Court will consist of 5 Judges' Chambers (2 criminal and 3 civil), 5 court rooms (again 2 criminal and 3 civil), registrar's unit, public prosecuting unit and supporting personnel space. The project is already awarded to the winning bidder and the anticipated completion date is January 2006.

In terms of social and/or economic spin-offs, it is believed that the construction and existence of the new court will see a reduction in the backlog of criminal cases, while at the same time enabling accessibility to in-service training for law students recruited around institutions of higher learning in the Province. Some employment opportunities will also be created although not of a massive type. Massive job creation is the responsibility of the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) which seeks to create at least one million temporary job opportunities and concomitant skills development in the next four years.

The EPWP was launched on 18 May 2004 by President Thabo Mbeki at Giyani in Limpopo and is being coordinated by my Department, the National Department of Public Works. By end of September 2004, the EPWP had created close to 80 000 jobs (76 000) and is in line to surpass a first year target of 130 000 jobs by 31 March 2005.

The preparations for the hosting of the Soccer World Cup in 2010 will, among others, require a public service that is able in order to fully expend infrastructure capital budgets, as well as a competent construction industry to deliver quality products on schedule, on specification and within budgets.

As a Department charged with the transformation of the construction industry in South Africa, we have every faith in the men and women of construction to rise above any challenges and assist the government to meet its millennium goals among others, the realization of NEPAD objectives including infrastructure development. After all it is the same industry that contributed memorable hallmarks to our civilization such as the Great Pyramids of Egypt, the Great Wall of China, the shrines of the Incas in Central America and the Great Buildings of Mueno Mutapa of Zimbabwe.

The launch of the Construction Industry Transformation Charter later this year will bring nearer the vision of government as encapsulated in the 1996 White Paper on creating an enabling environment for the growth, development and transformation of this industry. Without doubt, the construction industry is a national asset and should be regarded as such particularly considering that infrastructure backlog among others is what sets apart the developed countries from those still developing.

We wish the project a speedy completion without compromising on quality. We know that it will bring immense benefits to the people of the area and the surroundings.

I thank you.