

**Address by the Deputy Minister of Public Works, Mr Ntopile Kganyago, At  
the World Federation of Technical Assessment Organisations**

**Venue: Farm Inn, Pretoria**

**Date: 22 September 2008**

**Programme Director**

**Chairperson of the Board of Agreement SA, Mr Pepi Silinga**

**Chief Executive Officer, Mr Joe Odhiambo and Management**

**Secretary General of the WFTAO, Mr Thomas Bruun**

**Members of the Presentation Team**

**Ladies and Gentlemen**

It gives me great pleasure to join you today at the opening session of this exciting 13<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting of the World Federation of Technical Assessment Organizations. This occasion is particularly special since it has drawn together specialists, researchers and practitioners to focus on the role of technical assessments for building and engineering sectors.

On behalf of all of us I would like to thank Mr Pepi Silinga and the Board of Agreement, as well as the CEO, Mr Joe Dhiambo, for their foresight in bringing this meeting in South Africa as we desperately need all the expertise in this field of built environment. As a country we need to build millions more of houses for our people and the conventional building materials may not really suffice as they are mostly expensive and inaccessible for poor people. So it really is great to see that Agreement Board

is continuing to build bridges between the public and private sectors in providing assurance on fitness for purpose of non-standardised products.

We are all aware of the crucial role that Agrement South Africa is playing in the certification of innovative construction materials and development. As part of our commitment to the eradication of shacks and other inadequate structures, we will increasingly need this organization to work even harder in procuring and popularizing these materials and building systems. We know that these materials and systems provide an alternative to the conventional one in terms of costs, job opportunities for local communities and energy efficiency.

The growth of the South African construction industry in recent years bodes well for the vision that we set ourselves in the mid 1990s when we drafted and adopted the White paper on the creation of an enabling environment to stimulate the development, growth and transformation of the sector.

Underpinning this growth should, among other things, be the ability of the country to constantly generate new innovative technologies in support of quality products and services. There is also the need to improve the speed of delivery in our industry which is necessitated by the backlogs in socio-economic development. The role of Agrement SA therefore is really indispensable in this scenario.

Since its foundation in 1969, Agrement SA has been in the forefront of pioneering research and the ultimate approval and certification of non-standardised and innovative construction products, building systems and roads products as central to its mandate. As a continent claiming its rightful place among the nations of the world, Africa needs to dig deep into its ingenuity to produce home-grown solutions to its many problems, including technologies biased towards promoting job creation, human resource development, social and economic growth.

We are excited about the achievements of Agreement South Africa. We would like it to accelerate its role in the fight against poverty and underdevelopment. I would like to pay tribute to the current Board for a great job that it is doing in positioning this organization in its proper context of providing solutions to the pressing needs of our country. We look forward to your continued contribution to the ideals of African renaissance as you contribute to the SADEC region.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The theme of this meeting is so apt for our country at this time: “Green Buildings and sustainable building products” . This theme aptly captures the central role of your organizations in the provision of infrastructure and construction industry products that are crucial for social and economic development. We need building materials that will conserve our energy sources whilst at the same time they are also durable. We all know that construction creates the foundations of our global economy and the basis for human advancement. It also accounts for about ten percent of the global economy and provides much needed employment and dignity to millions of people around the world. But as we are slowly learning across the globe, this must not be done in a reckless and wasteful manner. We need to conserve our natural resources as much as possible.

It is not surprising therefore that many governments, including our own here in South Africa, are actively promoting an efficient and effective industry that uses resources better, that reduces waste and that transforms the working environment of its people for better employment and greater productivity. As regulator and client to the industry, governments in both developed and developing countries are encouraging practices that promote social and economic priorities. These include improved health and safety and more positive environmental outcomes.

There are of course many priority issues on the agenda of the developing world. Few of them however assume the same urgency as the issues of infrastructure deficiencies, backlogs and disparities.

The legacy of uneven development and under-development in Africa and elsewhere in post-colonial societies is well known. It continues to inhibit our capacity to deliver infrastructure that supports the full participation of developing societies in global economic endeavour. This is certainly true of our own experience in South Africa and infrastructure development continues to occupy a central position in government's agenda to roll back the underdevelopment of decades of apartheid and centuries of colonialism.

The inherited backlog of uneven development coincides with the need for new levels of infrastructure investment to deliver South Africa's *Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative (ASGI-SA)*. ASGI-SA aims to achieve an economic growth rate of 6% and to halve poverty and unemployment by 2014 in line with our commitment to the UN *Millennium Development Goals*.

Going forward it is will also be important to further raise the level of cooperation between industry, government and the research and academic community to increase the focus and funding for relevant construction related research. Within the framework of SADC, I am also of the view that we should explore the potential for regional dialogue to address construction industry development and infrastructure challenges. Your organizations should play a critical role in this dialogue. If we are to provide the people of Africa with innovative and cheap construction materials, you will need to be much more active across this continent.

In closing I would like to thank you all for your contribution to this meeting of the Federation of technical assessment organizations. You, the delegates, have will shape the outcomes and recommendations that come out of this conference. We call on you as industry, academics and researchers to be activists in developing the construction sector and its contribution to global development.

I urge you all to carry the message back home with you, to be leaders and activists – and to set the example. I am particularly encouraged by the participation at this conference of a very capable delegation from South Africa and am certain that important lessons they will share and learn will

filter into our systems and programmes for improving the quality of life of millions of South Africans.

The construction industry the world over, but particularly in developing countries, has a pivotal role to play in infrastructure development. The key lies in unlocking the many impediments which curtail its tremendous potential for shaping a sustainable destiny for all of humanity. I am certain that the distilled experience of this conference will stimulate progress towards that goal.

I wish you well in your deliberations over the next three days.

I thank you.