

The Deputy Minister of Public Works, Mr Ntopile Kganyago, MP, delivers a Keynote speech at the National Construction Week event to pay tribute to youth working on improving public infrastructure under the National Youth Service

Date: Tuesday 29 July 2008

Venue: Birch Wood Hotel & Conference Centre,
Ekurhuleni, Gauteng

- The Programme Director
- Senior Management from Public Works and Umsobomvu Youth Fund
- Distinguished Guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

I have recently returned from addressing an Enterprise Development Conference in Cape Town, put together among others, by the Umsobomvu Youth Fund. It is no coincidence that lately our paths seem to cross more often, it is all because that as a country, we have needed the call to spare no resources in nurturing our youth, in preparation for a greater, brighter and better tomorrow.

We meet again here tonight, barely a month after the nation has had commemorations, to remember and celebrate the heroic strides and other sacrifices made by the Youth of 1976 who dedicatedly laid a foundation for a prosperous, democratic, non-racial and non-sexist South Africa.

When approached with an invitation for tonight, I readily accepted upon hearing about further sacrifices that you, the youth of today, sitting here tonight, were making, working with the community to help build necessary accommodation in fulfillment of government's wish to create habitable settlements. Indeed an industry such as the construction one must be proud to count among its participants, the prowess and selfness of people like yourselves.

Since 1990's as government, we have expressed confidence in the ability of the construction industry to contribute immensely to the reconstruction and development of our lives. Our investment in this industry, in our efforts to make it an industry of choice, is beginning to pay off. Not only is R90 billion invested annually into this industry, the construction industry has steadily increased its contribution to the GDP of the country in the past few years and today accounts for no less than 8% of our GDP.

In recognition the governments, through the Department of Public Works, initiated the National Construction Industry Development Week, popularly called the National Construction Week or NCW, to pay homage to the Contribution that the industry was making to growth, development and transformation in our country. One of this is the development of skills especially among the youth, to breed a class of youngsters who will choose the construction industry as an industry of choice for their skills, careers and the future.

You will recall that when the NCW campaign first started in 2006, we focused on Youth and Skills and dedicated the whole of 2006 to honouring youth who were making a change through their involvement with industry. Last year our focus shifted to woman and celebrated their courage and bravery for tackling entrenched sexism and gender bias so characteristic of the construction industry. In 2008, we thought, let us recognize the small, developing and emerging contractors.

Some might ask a question, why then are we honoring youth, yet again, tonight. The answer is simple, we thought hard about it ourselves and concluded that, amongst you tonight, others will want to persevere to become small construction enterprises of tomorrow. As they say in Isizulu, inkunzi isematholeni, meaning that the future bulls and cows are today seemingly just calves. We like this idea of inkunzi ematholeni and we are considering applying the concept but also growing it to cover our activities involved with Youth development such as the National Youth Foundation the Military Skills Development Programme and the Expanded Public Works Programme for National Youth Service.

With time training, mentorships, capacity-building and good nurturing, we believe that you, as a class of 2008, will soon graduate to become entrepreneurs involved with this industry. This was the emphasis at the recent Umsobomvu Enterprise Development Conference that I attended in Cape Town.

As we celebrate that 2008 National Construction Week, we like to thank you for your apparent dedication and we believe that as hard as the construction industry appears to be, many of you will actually consider joining this industry so that you can be part on men and woman who on daily basis lay the concrete foundations for the growth, development and transformation of our society. When we say South Africa Works, it must be because of people like yourselves. You are an inspiration.

Thank you.