

The Deputy Minister of Public Works, Mr Ntopile Kganyago - MP, delivers an address on the occasion to mark the opening of the 4th CIDB Post Graduate Conference

Date: 9 October 2006
Venue: Stellenbosch, Western Cape

- **The MEC for Transport & Public Works, Mr Marius Fransman**
- **The Chairperson of the Construction Industry Development Board, Mr Pepi Silinga**
- **All members of the Board present here today**
- **The Outgoing CEO of CIDB, Mr Spencer Hodgson**
- **Professor Fred Hugo and other Members of the Organizing Committee**
- **Participants from various academic institutions**
- **Industry Experts and Industry Leaders**
- **Distinguished Guests**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen:**

The fact that this Conference has entered its fourth year is indicative of the milestone we have reached as a partnership of government, the industry and the academic establishment.

Since its establishment in 2001, the Construction Industry Development Board, has demonstrated resolve in its mandate to achieve its set objectives. One of those is the need to grow the body of knowledge through among others research and development in order to position the construction industry as one of the key contributors to social and human development as well as to economic growth.

Almost thirty various topics will be presented at this conference covering diverse areas critical to the development, reconstruction and growth of the construction industry as a catalyst to the prosperity of the country. In this we like to acknowledge the important role that the organizers, the University of Stellenbosch and the CIDB have played in putting together this mammoth organization. Gratitude should also go to the selfless efforts of research who spend considerable resources including their precious time, to bring us information and knowledge we require to shape some of our strategic considerations.

The success and prosperity of South Africa is the challenge facing all the people and sectors of our country. To build sustainable and concrete foundations for development, the country requires the construction industry that is committed, mobilized, enabled and supported. Historically, government has built a solid relationship with the construction industry in recognition of the industry's role to facilitate reconstruction and growth objectives of the nation. The provision of good quality public and commercial infrastructure remains the responsibility of the construction industry.

Consequently, the industry must undergo a fundamental self-analysis process to review its capacity, role, status and extent of its contribution to wealth creation. Recent initiatives such as the National Construction Week are a jolt to the industry, calculated to create awareness among ordinary South Africans of the significance of this sector to their lives. Many decades of self deprecation have meant that the industry was beginning to lose faith and confidence in its ability to be the bright shining star of our development. Instead much energy went into agonizing about challenges in front of us including scarcity of skills, limited capacity, procurement environment, demand versus supply, safety and health issues and others. In all this, we seemed to lose sight of the basic rule of survival – that is, challenges are necessary condition for ingenuity. This thinking is central to ASGISA – Accelerated and shared Growth Initiative for South Africa.

According to ASGISA, the country has in its midst incipient star performers. Ours is to recognize them, structure them and give them strong support in pursuit of growth objectives. Infrastructure development and provision, as part of the construction industry is one such star performer. The ability

of the country to house its people, undertake world-class mega projects and procure essential public infrastructure that will propel service delivery and alleviate poverty – is actually an opportunity.

Like most industries, the construction sector relies on continuous generation of new thoughts and ideas for its sustainability and competitiveness. Academic institutions are vital in this regard. Without in-depth research and development, yesterday's challenges will become today's impediments. At the recent World Exhibition held at Archi in Japan in 2005, the Japanese Railway Corporation unveiled a Super MAGLEVA project, a product of their many years of research and innovation which is set to re-revolutionize railway travel. The super magnetic Levitating Vehicle is a super-fast train capable of reaching 600 kilometers in an hour (i.e. will cover a distance of Johannesburg to Durban in one hour) and is billed as leading the third revolution in railway designs and automation. Among this country's leading academic institutions, I am convinced we have the caliber that can produce an impressive quantity and quality of scientists to revolutionize our built environment and help the government achieve in record time, its vision of habitable

human settlements and other millennium goals. As government, we support and encourage a research-oriented industry as a means to a prosperous nation. Continuous innovation forms the heart of continuous improvement and both are important for high levels of professionalism, productivity and profitability.

In their quest to reposition themselves, our academic institutions are encouraged to raise their standards in the areas of research and development so as to bequeath the industry and the nation a legacy contained in a body of knowledge necessary for progress. Conferences such as this one are important in providing opportunities for the growth and development of the researchers thus perpetuating the skills base in the industry. Again we like to acknowledge the contribution of the CIDB and tertiary education institutions in the development and consolidation of the skills and knowledge base required for the industry.

Our challenge still remains the creation of a sustainable feeder stream for our tertiary institutions. In this regard our partnership should continue to promote our built environment disciplines as career destinations of choice particularly

among our secondary schools learners. It is plausible therefore to strengthen our cooperation as government, business, civil society and academia in support of all efforts to profile the construction industry. We need to increase our investments in the National Construction Week campaign to make it one of the most discernible and top-of-mind campaigns. Opportunities such as Career Exhibitions, Scholarships, bursaries and Take-A-Girl-Child-to-work need to be fully exploited and exhausted to ensure that we live no stone unturned in helping to replenish our precious human resources. For us as a country, there is no limit to an amount of investment we should be making in building our own skills is expensive.

Often some of the misperceptions about the construction industry relate to the concepts of safety, health and environment. It is important that we are seen to be striving hard to becoming a safety-conscious industry. In the past our safety records compromised our claim to professionalism. It is believed that measures such as the Registers of Projects and Contractors will among others address safety considerations. The CIDB as a driver deserves our support in this regard.

The industry launched its HIV/Aids strategy few years ago and our appeal to the participants is to work, with government to make this an every day management action in our organizations as well as at the construction sites. One of the difficult management aspects of HIV/Aids is that the spread of the disease is a matter of choices people make however, there is no replacement for robust awareness and mobilization campaigns. We all are affected by the extent of the pandemic, so let us all act together in unison against the disease.

As part of the built environment, the construction industry should take a leadership role in ensuring a sustainable and a fair balance between the industry and the natural environment. Profits are only secondary to the ability of nature to sustain our activities for generations to come. Environment Impact Assessment Studies, environmental friendly construction design and use of materials less damaging to the natural environment are essential and their use and application should also be the subject of our research and development.

Conclusion

I wish you a successful conference and express a belief that like its predecessors, this gathering will further generate practical ideas that the industry so desperately need to strengthen its competitiveness. On behalf of the Department I would like to thank the outgoing CEO of CIDB, Mr. Spencer Hodgson, for his pioneering spirit, Spencer has been an invaluable contributor to the future vision of this industry and his diligence and passion will be fondly remembered.

I THANK YOU