

**REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS AND INFRASTRUCTURE SIHLE ZIKALALA
DURING THE ENGINEERING AWARDS AT THE UNESCO 9th AFRICA ENGINEERING WEEK AND
AFRICA ENGINEERING CONFERENCE, CSIR CONVENTION CENTRE, PRETORIA, 27
SEPTEMBER 2023**

Excellencies and Members of the Diplomatic Community in our midst;
President of the Federation of African Engineering Organisation, Engineer Papias Kazawadi Dedeki;
President Elect of the World Federation of Engineering Organisation, Engineer Mustafa Shenu;
Leadership and Representatives of UNESCO;
President of the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA), Engineer Refilwe Buthelezi;
Senior Government Officials;
Sponsors and Social Partners;
Members of the Press;
Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen;
ALL PROTOCOLS OBSERVED!

Good Evening!

Tonight's Award ceremony resonates with the theme of the UNESCO 9th Africa Engineering Week, **"Celebrating and Growing Engineering Excellence in the African Region"**.

These prestigious awards celebrate innovation, ingenuity, quality, outstanding technique, and leadership which are evident in the various categories.

As the Department of Public Works and Infrastructure, we are delighted to join you to give recognition to these outstanding engineers and leaders, many of whom are the pillar of the construction industry and mainstay of the economy.

The finalists and award winners are bound by a strong bond that stems from their shared hard work.

They are being recognised not merely for designing gadgets or infrastructure, but for being at the heart of designing societies.

They are being honoured for reminding us that engineering is ultimately an act of service in advancing the course of humanity and improving lives.

Our heartfelt congratulations go not only to the winners, but also to their colleagues, teams, and institutions.

If indeed talent is every nation's prime asset, let us today blow the horn and beat the African drum to celebrate the supremely talented engineers and committed organisations powering this noble and dynamic profession.

We congratulate you as you remind us that it is this profession that inspires optimism and restores hope when nations are faced with doubt and calamities.

Despite challenges, setbacks, and risks, the engineering industry continues to epitomise progress and the rebirth of our continent.

In this regard, we recognise and value the collaborations, pragmatism, and solidarity displayed by the Engineering profession.

As a country like South Africa which recently emerged from major disruptions and calamities emanating from the COVID-19 pandemic, social unrest, and devastating floods, we pay tribute to the entire engineering fraternity for being with our people in our hour of need to save lives and livelihoods.

The engineering profession has become a pillar of South Africa's Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan because without it, we will not be able to build the energy plants to power Africa, the dams to bring safe drinking water to remote rural areas.

Because of your skills, we will be able to build the rail, ports, and roads infrastructure to connect Africa and advance regional integration.

The Africa We Want which is envisaged in the AU's Agenda 2063 cannot take root without Africa's engineers or an investment in the profession.

It is you engineers who answer the noble call to serve neighbours, villages, and towns by building tools and infrastructure that improves every aspect of life.

We pay tribute to you for utilising science to find practical solutions to the challenges facing our continent.

Since the start of Africa Engineering Week, a great emphasis has been put on strengthening STEM education and getting more young people in Africa to become Engineers so that Africans can drive the change that will catapult development and address the challenges of poverty and underdevelopment.

Thanks to UNESCO and other partners for ensuring that Africa Engineering Week is also seized with the important question of developing and retaining more female engineers. The task of achieving gender equality requires practical steps from all social partners, and these Awards help us to nurture female talent and recognise their contribution and excellence.

It would remiss of us not to thank the South African media fraternity and the global media for the huge interest it has taken in publicising Africa Engineering Week. These are the stories that we need to tell more about Africa, about Africans that are excelling in STEM and in improving the lives of African people. Thank you media professionals for playing your part in generating an interest in this field and we encourage you to do so beyond this conference.

To the scientists and engineers in the room, let us finally remember the importance of adhering to the ethics of your profession. This means using science and engineering humanely, not against humanity or the human species.

This is particularly important with the exciting developments in Artificial Intelligence (AI) and drone technology where engineers and scientists must still care about human-centred development.

You carry the responsibility to avert the possibility of robots and machines enslaving humans or displacing humans' productive jobs without training people for the skills of the future.

As engineers, you exist to serve humanity, not to contribute to its distortion, or its destruction and even annihilation. We look to you to raise the ethical considerations so that your work is not weaponised against humanity or used only to serve narrow business interests at the cost of the greater good.

As the neurosurgeon Naskar puts it, engineering or ***“science without accountability is no different from a conspiracy theory.”***

He insists that some prototypes must never be commercialised, not till we learn to look beyond monetary value.

He cautions that while in future engineers and scientists ***“will be able to pre-edit a new born baby, but just because we could, doesn’t mean we should.”***

This is a call for science and engineering to be restored with humanity, with the imperatives of protecting and enhancing life.

Indeed, there can be no doubt that the whole world is in your care as people of science and engineering. Your role transcends all law and politics and hence you should remain accountable in your research, inventions, and engineering designs.

We invite engineers and scientists from across the globe to join us here in Africa to use STEM to build and industrialise Africa.

We call on African Engineers in the diaspora to return to their ancestral home to plough back the skills they have acquired from all corners of the world.

It cannot be that a continent which is the birthplace of humanity and cradle of human civilisation will be hampered in growth and development because of skills shortage.

You must be the engineers and architects of the African Renaissance which Seme, Nkrumah, Nyerere, Azidikwe, Du Bois and many Pan Africanist envisaged.

No one will do it for Africa if we do not do it for ourselves.

Let me conclude by drawing from founding President Mandela’s speech at the Organisation of African Unity, in Libya in June 1994. He made an impassioned call on the African Renaissance by calling on all Africans to make a contribution on rebuilding the ancient city of Cathage.

Madiba said:

“In the distant days of antiquity, a Roman sentenced this African city to death: “Carthage must be destroyed!”

And Carthage was destroyed. Today we wander among its ruins, only our imagination and historical records enable us to experience its magnificence...

During the long interregnum, the children of Africa were carted away as slaves. Our lands became the property of other nations, our resources a source of enrichment for other peoples and our kings and queens mere servants of foreign powers...

Where South Africa appears on the agenda again, let it be because we want to discuss what its contribution shall be to the making of the new African renaissance. Let it be because we want to

discuss what materials it will supply for the rebuilding of the African city of Carthage...Africa cries out for a new birth, Carthage awaits the restoration of its glory.

If freedom was the crown which the fighters of liberation sought to place on the head of mother Africa, let the upliftment, the happiness, prosperity and comfort of her children be the jewel of the crown."

There can be no dispute among us that we must bend every effort to rebuild the African economies."

Sons and daughters of Africa, let us answer the call of our ancestors.

"Let us all unite and toil together, to give the best we have to Africa" and make Africa the Tree of Life."

Congratulations again to all the deserving winners who one day will be remembered as the architects of Carthage, of a renewed Africa, where all her children will have a place under the warm African sun.

I thank you!