

Keynote Address by the Minister of Public Works, Ms Thoko Didiza on the occasion of ArchAfrica 2008 Sustainable Africa Mini Conference

Venue: Inkosi Albert Luthuli ICC, Durban

Date: 15 February 2008

Programme Director  
President of the South African Institute of Architects  
Members of the UIA, AUA and SAIA Councils  
Delegates from around the world  
Invited guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

Indeed it is a great honour to be invited to this conference that brings together all three separate architectural events into one gathering. I also know that this event is also your launch pad for your bid to host the 2014 International Union of Architects. I would like to add my voice to your bid and may you be successful in your endeavour. I am not just endorsing your bid because I am a South African Minister and a native of this province, but because I know the importance of this conferences to the overall development in shared expertise and experiences. I know that South Africa certainly has a lot of that to share with other countries, proof of that is this very facility in which we are gathered. So, Durban certainly deserves to host that conference in 2014.

This occasion is particularly special since it has drawn together specialists, researchers and practitioners to focus on the role of construction in economic and social development.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The conference theme “*construction for development*” aptly captures the central role of infrastructure and the construction industry in social and economic development. 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. 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*.

Our government is therefore determined to increase public sector capital budgets at an unprecedented rate of 10 – 15% per annum and to raise Gross Domestic Fixed Investment (GDFI) from 15% to 25% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP). To achieve these levels of infrastructure investment our construction industry will need to double its output by 2014. This constitutes a central challenge of partnership facing industry stakeholders in our country.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Confronted with these challenges our government is clear in its conviction that the South African construction industry is a national asset in the strategy to achieve economic growth and improve the quality of life of the majority of South Africans. Therefore, our role as government is equally clear - and over the past few years we have worked relentlessly to facilitate an enabling framework for industry growth and transformation. In South Africa we are also determined to transform the skewed racial ownership and participation profile of the industry – another legacy of our past. Giving practical expression to this determination, we have directed public procurement towards the empowerment of historically marginalised population groups and the creation of productive employment.

An increasing number of black and women-owned companies are now competing effectively in this sector of the economy. The established industry has also responded positively to this aspect of transformation and last year signed the Construction Charter, which commits the industry to concrete targets in terms of Black Economic Empowerment. I am pleased to say that most of the major companies have made progress towards these targets encouraging us to believe that together we can address many outstanding challenges.

The Register of Contractors established by the CIDB to regulate the industry now equips government and stakeholders with an important development tool and a clear understanding of the nature of contracting capacity and empowerment gaps across the industry.

Building on this Register, the Department of Public Works is preparing to launch a National Contractor Development Programme (NCDP) that will target development interventions aimed at the different contractor categories and grades. Within the framework of this programme we will expand our partnerships with industry and academia to address issues of skills, quality, safety and health.

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.

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