

**Adress by Minister Thoko Didiza on the occasion of the CIDB
Breakfast to honour women**

Venue: Birchwood Hotel, Boksburg

Date: 11 August 2008

Programme Director

Chairperson of the CIDB Board, Mr Raymond Nkado

Members of the CIDB Boards

Chief Executive Officer and management

President of Instruct, Ms Sarah Buck

President of the Master Builders Association of South Africa, Ms

Eunice Forbes

Honourable guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is a great honour for me to be invited to address this gathering, honouring women in the construction industry. It is always heartening to see women leaping up and ahead in a traditionally male-dominated industry like ours. It is even more heartening to see that we have in our midst all these women who have really made it to the top, like Ms Sarah Buck, who has been chosen as the first woman to lead Instructe in its 100 year history. Instructe, for those who may not know, is an association of civil engineers with members in various parts of the world.

Another notable woman in our midst is Ms Eunice Forbes, who is the first woman president of the Master Builder's Association of South Africa. These ladies deserve our full support in their roles as they are needed to show the way and open more doors for women.

I must say that after nearly fifteen years into our democracy, women are becoming fully involved and are now an integral part of construction and infrastructure provision in our country. I am happy about the role that organizations like Sawic are playing in building and providing leadership for women in this sector. Of course we are aware that if we are to have sustainable development, critical leadership skills should be built up. Cooperation between government and sector organizations in providing skills and opportunities for women contractors is critical in ensuring that women continue to claim their fair share of this industry by gaining skills and critical knowledge.

Giving practical expression to the support to women contractors, as a government, we have come up with a number of initiatives to help small and women contractors. We have directed public procurement towards the empowerment of historically marginalised population groups and the creation of productive employment.

The National Department of Public Works seeks to support and empower women-owned construction enterprises through its existing contractor development programmes. Since the inception of the procurement reform process in 1995, the Department has been actively involved in conceptualising and implementing programmes to

promote emerging contractors in the built environment. These programmes included Targeted Procurement and the Emerging Contractor Development Programme (ECDP)

As part of the ECDP, the Contractor Incubator Programme (CIP) was initiated in 2004 by the Department of Public Works.

The CIP targets contracting enterprises within categories three (3) to seven (7) on the CIDB grading. This enables these enterprises to be eligible to tender on contracts between R1,5 million and R30 million.

A total of 136 contractors are currently registered on the CIP, and 62 of these are women-owned contractors. This is 46% of all registered contractors. The CIP target for women-owned contractors for the current financial year is 50%.

Another programme which is aimed at improving the lot of women contractors is the Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). The EPWP is a national government initiative aimed at drawing a significant number of the unemployed people into productive work. .

The Department is also using its own expenditure as a way of meeting the challenge and improve the businesses that are women-owned. The total value of contracts that were awarded to women-owned companies in the 2006/2007 financial year amounted to R327million. In the period from April 2007 to December 2007, a total of R675 million was spent on women-owned companies, including

non construction enterprises. We plan to expand on this even more in this financial year.

As one of my abiding wishes, I would like to see the construction sector fully transformed and integrated whereby all the groups that were formerly excluded from this sector can get a chance to contribute towards the building of our country through infrastructure provision as well as making a solid living for themselves and those that they can employ. We need to nurture a cadre of skilled professionals and artisans across the whole subsections of this sector.

I would like to say that there are major issues affecting women in construction that I would like to see addressed as a matter of urgency in the short to medium term. These would be:

- Development support such as access to finances
- Technical skills sourcing,
- Business management skills
- Contract management skills

Our interventions that have been mentioned above will have to be strengthened and vigorously implemented in order to ensure that women contractors do not remain static, small time players in the construction space. We have set up all these mechanisms to ensure that the designated groups of people are able to benefit from this industry. Women organizations like Sawic are also urged to

strengthen their capacities to provide as much technical support as possible to women contractors.

Women need to make use of all programmes on offer, to improve their skills and expertise as well as to access job offers. I would say that the EPWP has gone a long way in alleviating poverty, especially for the rural poor, which women constitute a large percentage of. As one of government's key strategies contributing to the alleviation of poverty and unemployment, the EPWP creates work opportunities coupled to training to ensure that workers gain skills while they work, and increase their capacity to earn an income in the future.

Central to the structure of the EPWP is the provision of learnerships to previously unemployed beneficiaries, and Vuk'uphile, the EPWP Contractor Learnership Programme, is one of its flagship programmes. EPWP targets 40% women beneficiaries for every project implemented. That is why government has decided to extend the life span of the EPWP for another five years, starting in April next year until 2014.

I would like to caution that anyone who wants to enter this industry should pull up their socks and be prepared to work hard. The construction industry operates in a particularly project specific environment that has its own particular draw backs, characterised by a fragmented delivery process. The industry is mobile, and every project brings together new combinations of technology and resources, of professional disciplines, of contractors and subcontractors, skilled and unskilled workers, plant and equipment.

Construction is therefore a competitive and high risk business for both clients and the industry. In spite of all these issues I am mentioning, we as government are prepared to help as much as possible those who are keen to work hard.

We are still far from satisfying the acute shortage of skills in the construction sector. You must remember that there is a wide variety of skills that are needed in the various subsectors of the industry. We are in a grip of a huge skills shortage and that is why government is going flat out to source skills from every available source. That is why we have the National Youth Service, the recruitment of Cuban experts in the built environment, the Joint Skills Acquisition Programme which has been driven by the Presidency, the National Skills Training Programme run by the Sector Education Training Authorities under the Department of Labour. So, as you can see a lot of effort is being put by a wide range of government departments and agencies to fight our skills shortage.

In spite of the challenges that I have alluded to, we are trying as much as possible to brighten the future of this industry. We want all participants, including women, to feel part of the industry and to operate in a world class environment and to be able to deliver the best possible products. Finally, we want women to thrive just like their menfolk in this industry.

So, ladies, I say to you, go out there and make a difference in the lives of South Africans by providing world-class infrastructure as well as improving your own lives.

Malibongwe!

Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodwe!

I thank you.