

**The Minister of Public Works, Ms Thoko Didiza, MP, at the invitation of the Limpopo Provincial Government and SABC Phalaphala FM, addresses the Limpopo Divas Conference on the occasion to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Women's march**

**Venue:** Oasis Lodge, Polokwane, Limpopo.

**Date:** 08 August 2006.

- The Premier of Limpopo, Mr Sello Moloto
- All the Members of the Executive Council present.
- Members of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature.
- The Regional General Manager of SABC, Mr Victor Ravhuaziwo and all other SABC senior officials
- Government Officials in attendance
- Distinguished Guests.
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me a pleasure to be amongst you, in this, my maiden visit to the glorious province of Limpopo since my appointment as the Minister of Public Works. The location of Mapungubwe and Thulamela historical sites, Limpopo Province is always an inspiration, perhaps a compelling reason for us to revisit our history with the purpose of rediscovering it. Many remarkable events of historic proportions have happened here, in this northern corner of our country and we believe they are laden with historical significance, which if fully probed and established, will require us to further question our conventional notion of South Africa modern history.

The Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Witwatersrand, a woman and a scholar of note, Dr Belinda Bozzoli once remarked that modern South African history teaches us nothing but the unfolding of the Afrikaner Volk and the subjectification of blacks.

In order to justify the present under apartheid, historians, largely Afrikaans historians, began to look back at the past, in history, to find justifications for the existence of apartheid. In this they were assisted by theologians such as Dr D.F. Malan, the proponent of apartheid, who dissected the Bible to find the rationale for separate development and racial segregation. Our true history was and a version of history began to appear in our schools which celebrated Afrikaner military conquests over the natives, and like in the American Western Movies, began to give impression of the natives invading the private space of settlers with the intention to dispossess the settlers of their all, including land.

The lesson from this experience is that history tends to favour those who write it. If women in Africa and everywhere else were to record their history, their role in reconstruction, development and civilisation, would be different. Women would cease to be mere victims of men's acts of aggression, often seen on TV and other media, with babies on their back and bundles of meager possessions on their heads fleeing civil wars and other man-made disasters. If women were to write about their involvement in nation-building, community development, moral regeneration and education, the world's perception of women would change.

This is not at all intended to discredit men. However, we dare suggest that history about women not written by women is unlikely to be understanding and appreciative of women's struggle and other emotions as they toil side by side with their men folk to build a future for the nation. According to the history we read, which coincidentally is written by men, the text is punctuated by wars, military exploits and other acts of aggression so much that we have come to think of men as capable of nothing but aggression. The current images of war in Darfur and Lebanon do not better our perception of the destructiveness of men's involvement with history.

We all know the story of a young boy who kept on disturbing his priest father as he sat preparing a sermon for the next day. Wanting to find something to preoccupy him, the father took a picture of the map of the world, tore it into small pieces and asked the boy to reconstruct it. Within a few minutes the boy, much to the father's disbelief, had put the whole map together. Astonishingly the father asked the boy: "but how did you manage that?" The boy answered: "well it was easy, there was a picture of a man's face on the other side, so all I had to do was to fix the man's face and the world followed suit".

In 1955 when the democrats lined up the streets of Kliptown to adopt a Charter of Human's freedoms, women were part of that movement. A year later, women wrote their history when they put words into action. Women of South Africa,

both - black and white, old and young, rural and urban, educated and illiterate, literally marched onto Pretoria to warn one Prime Minister Strijdom not to tamper with the rock upon which humanity is founded. *“You struck the woman, you struck the rock and you would die”*. They warned Strijdom. Indeed Hans Strijdom died thereafter.

On the fiftieth (50<sup>th</sup>) anniversary of Women’s historic March, we gather here in Limpopo, the house of Mapungubwe and Thulamela, to demand that let our history be rewritten to accurately reflect the struggles of women and girl children, who daily toil to lay concrete foundations upon which human virtues are built in this Age of Hope. On this occasion, we salute the women of Tshipise Nzhelele (pronounced Njelele) who in 1998, with the small help of government’s Public Works Programme and Eskom funding, took a barren landscape and turned it into a productive machinery to feed themselves and the nation. We hail the women of Ga- Ramokgopa, Botokwa, who under the Community Based Public Works Programme, never hesitated to take opportunities available, no matter how limited, to improve theirs and the lives of the community. These and the women of Elandskraal took the hand of government in a partnership, to till the land, plant food and built infrastructure and join in the struggle to turn-back the tide of poverty.

The Community Based Public Works Programme was the government’s anti-poverty drive, in the mould of Reconstruction and Development, to use the core competency of Public Works, namely infrastructure development, to build basic but essential structures

that would improve the lives of rural communities during and after their construction. Between 1994 and 2004, the government through the Department of Public Works, invested more than two point five billion rand (R2.5 billion) in the CBPWP, helping to undertake more than 4000 projects, mainly of infrastructural type, and creating almost 164 000 job opportunities. Again women and youth benefited the greatest from the Programme until it was reviewed and expanded in 2004.

The resultant Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP) is a government wide initiative to involve all spheres and structures of government in using their line-function budgets to procure goods and services, labour-intensively, in order to create jobs, built skills and improve the standard of living of our communities. The Programme was launched by President Mbeki at **Giyani in Limpopo** in May 2004 with the explicit target of creating a million jobs, targeting women (40%) and youth (30%). The road construction example of the Gundo Lashu inspired the infrastructure sector of the EPWP and the model was replicated in other provinces. Unlike the CBPWP, the Expanded Public Works Programme is implemented by all government departments in the three spheres of government i.e. National, Provincial and Local – to massify its impact.

The EPWP was presented by government at the 2003 Growth and Development Summit as one of many governments's effort to fight poverty and contribute to employment creation. Alone the EPWP will never eliminate unemployment, hence government is creating an

enabling environment to encouraged the growth of the economy with the hope that the knock-on effects will expand the labour-absorptiveness of the economy and lead to the employment of more of our people. Other poverty-eradication initiatives of government include free housing, free schooling, social grants, systematic tax reduction for low – income earners, free basic water and electricity, seed funding for emerging entrepreneurs, land reform and erection of essential government infrastructure in communities where the were none before. Affirmative Action and Employment Equity and their relevant legislation were introduced to ensure fairness in employment and bring equitable demographic representation at the job market. These efforts by government collectively give meaning to the government’s commitment of creating a better life for all.

The success and the impact of the EPWP would only be discernible, I agree, once all structures of government begin to embrace the programme as theirs. To that effect my department and I have upped the rate of our advocacy and mobilization, to spur particularly the municipalities into implementing the requirements of their Integrated Development Plans in line with the precepts of EPWP of using labour-intensive methodologies. We have also begun to implement the recommendations of the Cabinet Lekgotla which call among others, for the upscaling of the EPWP especially in sectors such as the social and environment, which are amenable to further expansion.

Under the social sector, the plan is to bring more Early Childhood Development Centries into the net to increase the quantity of the jobs

created by this sector. We all know the maternal instinct as these women in our communities come forward to take care of our young ones while we are away at work. EPWP intends to formalize these centres and recognize these hands that rock the cradle of our development and upbringing. On the other hand, environmental concerns such as this unavailability of the domestic waste management services among most poor areas, have led us to produce a proposal to extend this service to more than 200 municipalities in all the provinces with the hope of creating jobs, strengthening emerging enterprises and improving the quality of the environment we inhabit. We have requested funding from the National Treasury, and believe that the local government will own up the idea and implement it.

At the risk of sounding complacent, we are happy with the progress of the EPWP but believe that much more can be done to continuously improve the programme and its effects. Since its inception, the Programme has created more than 300 000 jobs of which 49% went to women.

I want to thank the civil society including the media for their support in our first ever National Construction Week Campaign which we celebrated from 27 July to 03 August 2006. The aim of the campaign was to create awareness among South Africans about the role and importance of the construction industry in our reconstruction and development. For our youth, we encourage them to consider taking up a career in this industry. Career options are wide and varied

include disciplines such as engineering, architecture, quantity surveying, landscape architecture, property valuation and construction project management.

Currently the viability of this industry is threatened by a paucity of skills given the reluctance of our youth particularly by women to venture into construction mainly given its poor image. Also the average age of professionals involved in this industry is aging as more of them near the retiring age and there is less intake of new young ones. In order to bring South Africa on par with other developing nations, the country will need to invest in excess of R400 billion to clear the infrastructure backlog created by inequitable social planning under apartheid. Demands such as the recently announced infrastructure investment of R370 billion will expose the limitation of this industry in terms of the depth of its skills base. This concern has given rise to doubts and speculations about our ability as the country to host important events such as The FIFA 2010 World Cup Soccer Tournament. We share the optimism expressed by our President and will spare no effort as a country and its people, in actively labouring to make his promise a reality. The country needs women, men, youth and patriots to help it succeed.

In support of ASGISA and JIPSA and, in fulfillment of the undertakings we made in 1999 when we launched the White Paper on the Growth, Development and Transformation of the Construction Industry, the Department has on behalf of government, put into place a Construction Industry Transformation Charter. The Charter is consistent throughout its



pages in its objective to “achieve a substantial change in the racial and gender composition of ownership, control and management, in the sector”, among other scorecards. The Chief Executive Officer of the council for built environment (CBE), Dr Malindi Neluheni, herself a PhD graduate who studied transport engineering, was quoted in the recent edition of ***Service: Leadership in Local Government*** as saying:

*“The existing pool of qualified women built environment professionals is small, (and there are) socio-economic hurdles which further limit the attraction and retention of especially Africa women in the industry. While government has made significant strides in placing women in leadership positions in all spheres of government and industry, the narrow band of thinking of some professionals still places these women in a vulnerable position in various ways. It is often not enough to be competent, especially at leadership level, but one requires a great measure of emotional intelligence as well in order to make it in the field. I do not understand the mentality that thinks women are less suitable for the built environment professions than men. We taught, learn and are tested in the same way”.*

With regards to black women the Charter has called for 10% ownership, 20% control and 16% senior management representation (as part of employment equity) by 2013. These and other deliverables were adopted by the industry in the presence of government when we signed the Charter in May 2006, thereby negating the myth that construction-transformation-phobia had permeated the sector. South Africa, its people and the business sector are waking up to the reality that transformation

is both necessary and imperative to social stability and equitable economic prosperity. The Charter is in the process of being gazetted and the Department is formulating its implementation strategy.

I like to thank the organizers for their invitation and wish all the women a successful life. The struggles of the 1956 calibre and others before have laid a basis for the emancipation of women and enabled us today to sing in unison the songs of freedom. From this freedom let there spring eternal prosperity for the nation and its future generations regardless of gender.

I thank you.