

**Keynote Address by the Minister of Public Works, Ms Thoko
Didiza, on the occasion of the Northern Cape Provincial launch
of the National Youth Service.**

Venue: Christian Revival Church, Kimberley

Date: 13 September 2007

Programme Director

Honourable Premier

MEC's Present

Members of the Legislature

Executive Mayors and Speakers of Municipalities

Councilors

Senior Government Officials

CEO's of Public Entities

Invited guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to start off by greeting the people about whom we have gathered here today, the trailblazers of the National Youth Service.

Heita basha, heita

Phambili nge skills development, phambili

Forward with Youth Development, Forward

As Vuyo Mbuli always says about the trailblazers on his Morning Live Show, wubhoso, NYS, wubhoso.

It gives one great pleasure to be here this morning to witness yet another great stride being taken on the road to skills development and youth empowerment our country. As we have said right from the beginning when we launched the NYS in Botshabelo in Bloemfontein in April this year, the National Youth Service is not only about providing skills to the youth. Through the NYS we are building a cadre of young people who are prepared to put ahead the interests of their country. We want to develop in the young people that we are inducting into the NYS today, an ethos that says I will put my country first and develop it to its fullest potential. As the former President of the USA, John F Kennedy once said: “Do not ask what your country

can do for you, but rather what you can do for your country". That is the type of ethos that we want to see developed in all our NYS participants. Yes, we will teach these young people how to lay bricks, paint, plumb and weld. But we also want them to be proud South African citizens, ready to put their all in a national effort to improve their country.

Ladies and gentlemen, this provincial launch today is a first step on the long road to satisfying our country's great need for artisans as well as providing our youth with an opportunity to get started as employed people as well as being entrepreneurs.

During the state of the Nation Address in Parliament earlier this year, President Mbeki indicated an urgent need for the Expanded Public Works to be stepped up a gear to provide greater leadership to job creation and skills development efforts of government. We have tried to carry out the marching orders. We launched the NYS at Botshabelo in Bloemfontein on the 14th April this year. A lot of ground has been covered since that launch, hence this provincial launch today.

Honoured guests, our government assets, particularly our buildings, give us a particular leverage to be used to create employment for the youth. We are aiming for a skills revolution and empowerment for our youth. The young people who are being recruited to this programme will also be enrolled with our further education colleges and those industry colleges as artisan trainees so that at the end of their national youth service they would have given their service to their country whilst gaining skills for themselves as well.

The event today provides a beacon of hope for the youth of our country. It is also a clarion call for them to pick themselves up and make use of all the opportunities that are being availed to them for self-improvement and that of their country.

It is very important for all spheres of government to note that our EPWP programmes are just one component of Government's strategy to overcome unemployment and poverty. It is a national framework to be implemented by all public entities through their strategic objectives, revenue base and capital budgets. We are

focusing on using public sector spending so as to achieve developmental outcomes in respect of reducing unemployment and poverty. If implemented effectively, the impact could be significant, as public sector spending constitutes 25% of Gross Domestic Product.

Service delivery, poverty alleviation and job creation are paramount objectives of government. The National Youth Service is one of our strategies to deliver on these objectives. The maintenance and provision of infrastructure are some of the tactics. These areas of activity will create work opportunities for the youth that has been selected, but they will also help improve the skills base of the province.

Our focus on the construction sector and allied sectors takes full cognizance of the immense potential of the industry as a creator of job opportunities. Under the impact of growing investment and the EPWP, employment in the construction sector has risen greatly. With construction output set to double in the next ten years, the industry has the potential to generate thousands of jobs by 2014, contributing greatly to the goals of accelerated growth. Many of those who will be employed, will need to be skilled.

Indeed our country is in a grip of a great skills shortage and need. Our country is in the throes of a massive infrastructure development and improvement programme. With growth rates in construction spend of around 10% per annum, the highest that it has been in the last 30 years, construction spend is in fact growing at a higher rate than Gross Domestic Product. However, there are many challenges that need to be tackled in a range of public and private sector partnerships to further unlock infrastructure bottlenecks and to create capacity and skills.

The challenges in the built environment are huge and need urgent attention as the deadlines are so tight as well. Even as the government accelerates the infrastructure development, the demographic profile of registered built environment professionals is a long way from reflecting the demographics of the country. As the economy begins to boom with upward trends predicted well beyond 2010, there are increasing demands for professional services, and the pool of skills represented by built environment professions should increase accordingly. However, current trends, with specific reference to the built professions, indicate that this important skills base is in decline, with very few new entrants compared to the large numbers who are leaving the profession. That is why it is vitally important to continuously and urgently replenish the human resources in the built environment with young, enthusiastic and determined young people. This initiative could not have come at a more appropriate time in our development.

I want to acknowledge the work that has been undertaken by the province in recruiting and selecting this first batch of NYS participants that we are inducting today. It takes a lot of work and dedication to set up the systems and get the process going at great pace to meet the targets, especially tight targets like those that have been put for this first intake of NYS participants. Within the next couple of months we will all be needing to account on how far are we gone with this programme. That is why I am congratulating this province, which has got such a vast geographical stretch, that it has successfully coordinated the setting up of this programme.

Fellow South Africans, I firmly believe that with the launch of this programme, we are on course to meet our targets. All three spheres of government are forever looking for ways to better coordinate this programme and I believe that the uptake across the board can only improve from now on. Our collective effort and dedication will see us through the challenging tasks we are facing as a country. I would like to congratulate these young people who have been selected for this programme. I would like to sound a word of caution: this will not be a

hunky dory experience all the way. There will be challenges, there will be problems. But as someone has said, it does not matter how many times you fall, what matters is how many times you get up, dust yourself off and move forward until you reach your goal. Our challenge today is to ensure that those that have been selected keep to the task at hand and make us all proud at the end of the twelve months in this programme.

I am sure that everyone is aware of the strides we have made in the last 13 years of our democracy. And it is exactly for those successes that we cannot allow our country to regress because of the scourge of poverty and underdevelopment. And surely the acceleration of the NYS will ensure that we defeat these twin challenges in our country.

Once again I would like to congratulate everyone involved and wish you the best in all the work that lies ahead.

Thank you.

