

**Minister of Public Works  
Ms S.N. Sigcau, MP  
16 February 2006**

**National Construction Week Gala Dinner  
Cape Town Convention Centre, Cape Town**

Master of Ceremonies,  
Deputy Minister of Public Works, Mr Ntopile Kganyago  
Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee, Mr Fezile Bhengu  
Chairperson of the Construction Industry Development Board, Mr  
Pepi Selinga  
Government Advisors  
Chairpersons of the Construction Transformation Charter Group, Mr  
Mike Wylie and Mr James Ngobeni  
Acting Director General, Dr Sean Phillips  
Leaders of the construction sector, built environment & tertiary  
institutions  
Senior Government Officials  
Honorable Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

It seems only appropriate to be addressing the captains' of industry, tertiary institutions and built environment professionals in a building like the Cape Town Convention Centre. This building truly represents the remarkable changes we have experienced in the industry thanks to advanced design and technology. It was only forty years ago that modems, faxes, emails, cellphones and Computer Aided Drawings evolved.

It is incredible to think how fast technology can advance within a short-period of time, but how difficult it is to attract young people into an industry that is abuzz with such creativity and innovation.

While recently watching an advert on television to promote the African Cup of Nations, my thoughts raced back to the days when the stone-masons built the Pyramids in Egypt. These artisans were filled with pride as their central idea was one of building a better society, with their tools providing them with a multiplicity of emblems to illustrate the principles they were putting forward. The stone-masons

operated a secret society with employers appreciating outstanding pieces of craftsmanship, but their creators generally remaining anonymous. Yet their masterpieces still stand centuries later and they have left behind a legacy that will be witnessed by generations to come. The pride held by artisans and the fact that products outlive their creators is the kind of key messages that need to be conveyed to our youth to highlight the positive aspects of working in our industry. After all, our industry builds South Africa!

I wonder if the builders of the past would ever have imagined that their descendants would be sitting pondering the future of the industry. They would have assumed that the skills they had acquired, and which it was their task to ensure that others acquired, would remain essential to build their country. And they would have been right. South Africa needs professionals and artisans, but in particular young men and women today, just as urgently as they did then. They would have seen a great deal of common sense in what we are trying to achieve today and how we are going to go about it through an awareness campaign during the National Construction Week.

In his State of the Nation Address on 3 February, President Thabo Mbeki stated that: “Everything we have said so far, concerning the Accelerated Skills and Growth Initiative of South Africa – ASGI-SA, points to the inescapable conclusion that, to meet our objectives, we will have to pay particular attention to the issue of scarce skills that will negatively affect the capacity of both the public and the private sectors to meet the goals set by ASGI-SA. In this regard, I would therefore like to assure the Honourable Members and the country as a whole that, together with our social partners, we have agreed to a vigorous and wide-ranging skills development and acquisition programme to meet any shortfalls we may experience.”

Women are prioritized in the first instance, because they are underrepresented in the construction sector. There is therefore an urgent need to fast track women’s acquisition of project management skills so that they can effectively participate and benefit from the infrastructure rollout.

In fact studies have shown that the average project manager is male, white and over 50, hence making the skilling of a diversified group of people a necessity in order for the country to achieve its 6 % growth rate target. The construction charter has identified this as one of the risks facing the industry, especially when the existing experts retire. Apart from the identified need to transform the industry, there is no question that we need to bring in new entrants in the short-term, so that they can benefit from working along side experienced experts before they exit active employment. The second phase of skills development will have to look at youth and black people in general.

It is clear. The President has spoken. It is now time for the industry to join hands in addressing the major challenge we face regarding the shortage of skills.

Infrastructure spending by Government, municipalities and state-owned enterprises is set to grow strongly with spending expected to be around R350 billion in the next five years as part of ASGI-SA. Government will be focussing on a massive five-year investment plan for state-owned enterprises in infrastructure, energy and transport by attracting foreign investment and boosting economic growth. Projects such as the completion of the Port of Ngqura in the Eastern Cape, the construction of stadiums for the 2010 Soccer World Cup, the inner city revitalization project in Tshwane referred to as “Re Kgabisa Tshwane”, the construction of the Gautrain, The Berg River Water Scheme and the expansion of a number of ports capacity signals the beginning of a construction boom for the next few years. In order for us to achieve this, there needs to be an urgent and vigorous drive to attract the youth into our sector.

National Construction Week will make a significant contribution to the objectives of ASGI-SA by promoting the image and profile of the construction sector, so as to give young learners the opportunity to experience a wide range of exciting opportunities available in today’s built environment and construction sector.

The campaign’s objectives have been set out very clearly in the presentation shown a little earlier this evening, and I think you will agree with me in saying that our television, radio and media campaign is likely to arouse widespread public interest.

I battled to get my mind around the question of “How do you actually go about making the construction industry appealing to the youth?” After all, its about cement, bricks, mortar steel and glass. The campaign however focuses more on the people working in the industry. What we are really trying to convey is the message that the industry is overflowing with innovation, creativity and excitement and there are endless opportunities for the youth to get involved in the construction industry.

The true success of National Construction Week will be determined by the participation and involvement of the industry as a whole. I would therefore like to make an urgent call to all stakeholders in the industry to get together and commit your organizations to actively participate in National Construction Week. This is the perfect platform for Government departments, construction companies and built environment professional companies to arrange and host visits to construction sites and offices to create awareness about the various aspects of construction and the built environment disciplines and perform the task of ambassadors to schools in their areas. The Department has established a website and call centre for you to find out everything you need to know and how to go about hosting your event.

I would also like to call on the industry to assist the Department in co-funding certain aspects of the National Construction Week programme as part of its commitment. The Department has developed a sponsorship proposal which you will find on your tables. Let us therefore use National Construction Week to really show this commitment to the South African public, and in particular the youth in an effort to elevate the industry to new heights.

Let us all show that we are truly committed to building a positive profile and image of our industry, as this industry is vital to the South African economy. Together we can make it a world-class industry.

The road we are traveling together is rocky. But the stones on the path will become the masonry of the future. We have weathered the storms together and we have emerged stronger as an industry.

Let us be true pioneers and leaders sent on through the wilderness of untried things, to break a new path in the sector that is ours. Our youth is our strength; in our inexperience our wisdom. The future is out there waiting to build your dreams.

We need to focus our minds on what can be achieved during the Construction Week in July.