

**Minister of Public Works
Ms Stella Sigcau
9 December 1999**

[Back](#)

Launch of the Tombo Government Centre, Tombo

Today we are launching the first One - stop Government Centre which is part of the programme to bring government closer to the people.

When President Thabo Mbeki said in June that the people had spoken, he was emphasising that government belongs to the people. You elected us to serve you. And today we start on a road that should make this more of a reality at local level - with various sectors of government interacting with people where they stay.

But this centre we are opening is as much a government centre as it is a product of the work community. You selected where it should be built, you decided on the main things you need, you prepared for the launch together. For this we wish to thank you. Indeed, without the active participation of the people, democratic government will never become a reality.

I wish to thank the youth, the women and the men of Tombo who came together to realise a dream. Special thanks to our leader Her Majesty Queen Ndamase and her Council for giving leadership to this process. All the people of Tombo are the true heroes of our new struggle: the struggle for development and a better life.

What is it exactly that we are launching here today? What is this complicated thing called a One - stop Government Centre? From today onwards, the following services will be available or completed:

- * A Communication Officer from Government Communications will be based here to provide government information on the policies and activities of government
- * There is a tele - centre to provide links through the Internet with the whole world, as well as telephone, faxing and copying facilities
- * From the public information terminal you can get government forms and other information, including tender documents
- * There will be a Citizen's Post Office
- * Pension payment and counselling service as well as life - skills training will be provided
- * Spoornet will provide computer training and support to surrounding schools.
- * Advice facilities will be available for agriculture
- * There will be an officer to provide support for such services as passports, Identity Documents and registration of births and deaths.

This may not be all the things you need. And we shall continue examining ways of improving this Centre. But what we have today is a far cry from just the health centre, arts and culture centre and business development centre.

Today the people of Tombo can also press the button and "send a paper" across rivers and mountains to friends and relatives. Today our students can press a button and get information from a library in London or New Delhi in India or Abuja in Nigeria. Today you can approach an officer of government to get information about business, job bursary and other opportunities.

It is no longer just for people in Europe and America to do these things. It is not only people in the big cities of Gauteng and the Western Cape who can press buttons. We too can do so, and exercise our right to information and to quick and efficient service. And I want to urge that you should harass the officers who will be working in these government offices. Don't take No for an answer.

We are particularly proud of this launch because we believe that we are helping to make your lives much easier.

You are aware better than anyone else of the burden of being sent from one place to another when trying to get government information and services. It is worse when distances are long, when transport is expensive, when the roads are not up to standard. Then there is the frustration of discovering after all the effort that you are in the wrong place, or you need an additional document to get what you want.

One - stop Government Centre are meant to lighten this burden.

President Thabo Mbeki has that we need to speed up the provision of service particularly in the rural areas. The Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Northern Province are among the priority areas in this regard. We

know that we still need to improve roads, we need to expand provision of electricity, we need to improve the conditions under which our children learn.

What we are celebrating today is an important step towards that direction. Indeed, as we moved closer to completing this centre, it became clear that we should have done some of the things a long time ago, and that with the will we can introduce them with speed.

Now, we shall not merely point a finger at a telephone line passing our village on the way from one city to another. This project made it possible to bring this service as fast as possible to the people of Tombo.

Now, we have a clearer idea of the many other needs you have, such as the provision of electricity. And plans are being finalised to ensure that electricity is available not only at this centre, but in the whole village.

So, from working together to build this centre, the challenge of bringing other services has become even more obvious. And we will do our best to meet them.

This One - stop Government Centre represents a realisation of the vision of our President for integrated services to communities on the one hand and government on the other.

To set up these facilities, we did not have to find a site and erect new buildings. We worked together, using the Community Centre, to bring together existing community facilities and government services.

During the course of the next three years, the Government Communication and Information System intends to set up information centres in each district of the country, that is 55 in all. Cabinet has approved this project.

In this process, Government Communications will be together with the Department dealing with Arts and Culture which has already set up community centre in many parts of the country, it will be working together with other Departments such as Welfare, Labour, Trade and Industry, Home Affairs, those responsible for telephones, and others to ensure that people find assistance in one place, so that you do not have to waste time and money moving from pillar to post.

By being the first in this 3 - year campaign, Tombo is providing us with many lessons which will stand us in good stead in other parts of the country. Among us today are information officers from many of our provinces who have come to learn from you how things are done.

From this experience we will learn how to identify community needs and meet them, how to build the skills and capacity of people in the villages, how to improve networking among national, provincial and local government, how to ensure that government interacts directly with the people on a day to day basis, and how to improve all the services that government offers. Some things we will do well. We may also make mistakes in the process. But it is those who sit on their hands who do not make mistakes.

Today we have reason to celebrate. But as we should not forget the many other structures and individuals who made this dream a reality. We pay tribute to the Tombo Launch Committee, which has made all the necessary arrangements for this celebration. We salute the Port St Johns TRC and the Kei District Council through their Chairperson Mrs Xasa who have been strong supporters of the project. We are grateful to our Premier Makhenkesi Stofile, MEC's and the officials of the Province, without whose support and guidance, this centre would not have seen the light of day.

At national level there are many structures that are not within departments which have spared no effort to ensure the success of this project. Some of them are: the Universal Service Agency which has set up the tele - centre, Telkom which has brought the telephone lines, Eskom which is working on provision of electricity, and others which assisted us with research and other information.

All these people and structures worked day and night to make this centre a reality because they wish to contribute to building a better life for all.

Now the challenge is yours: use the facilities in this centre, protect the centre from vandals and ensure that the equipment in it is safe, improve the yard and the surroundings, to make the area attractive and inspiring to all. Make this the centre of Tombo's community life.

In conclusion, I wish to bring you a special message: We all know that many people die on our roads during the festive season - please drive carefully, do not speed, do not drink and drive. We all know that there is a terrible virus called Aids/ HIV which wants to finish all of us - please protect yourselves and your families.

It is only when we work together to take care of ourselves as individuals and as communities, it is only when

we join hands to take care of and improve centres like this that we can together ensure that South Africa is a nation at work for a better life.

Thank You

[top](#)