

**Minister of Public Works
Mr J Radebe
14 January 1999**

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**Farewell for Siphon Shezi, Director-General, Department of Public Works
Presidential Guest House
Pretoria**

Master of Ceremonies,
Ministers,
Directors-General,
Representatives of the ILO, Industry, and Consultants
Management, personnel and staff of the DPW,
Friends, ladies and gentlemen,

I am especially pleased to be your host this evening at this important event. As we all know, farewell functions are not normally celebrations, nor are they necessarily happy occasions. In recent weeks some political parties and media speculation have suggested that the departure of Directors-General from government service since 1994 indicates that, to juggle Hamlet's phrase, something is rotten in the state of South Africa. Fingers have been pointed to an alleged malaise in the state of administration at best, and a tendency within our coalition government of a cronyism at worst.

I reject with contempt these suggestions as the misinformed ramblings of mischievous speculators. I do so especially in the case of the departure of my Director-General, Siphon Shezi.

The inception of a new government in April 1994 occurred in the context of a completely different political system that required new forms of governance, expertise, and vision. A democracy could not be built on the foundations of the old, authoritarian, bureaucratic ethos inspired by a desire to benefit the privileged few against the majority of our citizens. This meant, simply, that old styles of work had to be replaced with new ones. Consultation, openness, respect for the public, especially women and children, underpinned an acknowledgement that government is about co-operation and partnership with society rather than a top-down affair. Development projects had to take into account environmental and people's needs and requirements. Those critical role players responsible for the delivery of infrastructure, such as the construction industry, related professions of architects and engineers, valuers and the workers themselves, had to re-assess the way they interacted with each other, with the state, and with the public. The new imperatives of a democratic order included the requirement that the state itself had to be a primary agent of change in society.

I can speak only for the ANC, but it is important to note that when we considered the deployment of people to various positions in government, parliament, and civil society generally prior to the election, we made specific choices. We had a clear understanding that deployment occurred in many instances according to a set of particular goals and timeframes. Let us not forget that after 1994 government and parliament were caught up in a twofold process. Firstly, we had to govern the country in a manner consistent with the democratic dreams of the majority of South Africans, and secondly, we had to draw up a new constitution as a foundation for our new democracy. The interaction of these processes required a delicate yet firm approach within each and every government department. In fact, whilst much of the constitution-making work was conducted in the Constitutional Assembly in full view of public participation, departments were engaged in the complex task of identifying specific areas of work that helped shape or would need alteration to fit the constitutional requirements of transformation and reconciliation.

If I can turn now to DPW specifically, in the context of the period after 1994, we had, for example, to ensure that our department, acting as a procurement agency for the state, developed and implemented specific proposals that combined affirmative action, openness, fairness, and value-for-money. As the state's effective landlord, we had to assess whether the property portfolio was managed beneficially and profitably within the parameters of the RDP. As a regulator of the major professions operating within the construction sector we had to examine the extent to which their roles, tasks, functions and composition reflected not only constitutional needs of representivity but also those of efficiency and professionalism.

In one critical area the DPW was required to break new ground: we were appointed as the major co-ordinator of the RDP's community-based public works programme, an ambitious yet absolutely necessary project to assist in the alleviation of poverty amongst the poorest of the poor in our country. The Department I inherited was unable to fulfil that task. Hence, I appointed Siphon Shezi as the Convenor of a Special Task Team to advise, develop, implement the CBPWP and set up the relevant structures within the department to run with the programme. Siphon's record as a young academic from KwaZulu-Natal working in the field of

transformation emphasised his competence. More significant for me personally, however, was the privilege of appointing someone who I had recruited into the ANC underground in Natal. We were fortunate to be able to draw on a number of people with a fine track record in the struggle for democracy to make up that Task Team. Siphso was joined by, amongst others, Lulu Gwagwa, Sivi Gounden, and Lisa Seftel. In time many of these very able people were incorporated into government in one capacity or other. It is now a matter of historical record that the hesitation towards change we experienced from the old department was overcome when I asked Siphso to assume the position of Director-General in 1995. That appointment was backed up with other changes in the hierarchy.

The management team has shown clearly the strength of our relationship with civil society covered by the concept of "Batho pele", or "the people first". Essentially, civil servants are servants of the people. They help to develop policies for government, but they do not control policy-making. They are charged with the task of implementing policies that are approved through the interaction of government and parliament. Whilst you take your lead from government, you function in a non-partisan manner. The example you have set must be built on in the future.

One of the strengths of the change in 1995 was the development of healthier relations with Parliament, as well as the development of a better understanding within the department of government's approach to affirmative action and the need to share skills, and to build a common esprit de corps. As Minister, I believe fundamentally that the DPW is a home for all South Africans who are committed to the challenges of building a new society within the framework of our constitution's requirements and our government's policies. This belief has been shared by the DG and his able team of DDG's and will not change one iota in the future.

Four years on, I am happy to report that the Department has been placed on an irreversible process of change, aimed at delivering an improved service in all spheres of its mandate to this country's citizens. This change is attributed largely to the sterling leadership provided by Siphso and his management team. Amidst challenging circumstances, Siphso and his team have successfully managed to re-engineer the activities of the Department, where in certain sectors of the Department, we can boldly claim to be ranked with the best in the world. Some of the initiatives worthy of note include:

- the introduction of project management principles in the management of our construction projects;
- the commencement of the compilation of the first ever integrated state asset register in South Africa;
- the promotion of infrastructural public-private partnerships through APOPS;
- introducing a revised approach to the financial management of the department and the associated internal audit controls and fraud awareness programmes;
- the promotion of affirmable business enterprises on the department's construction projects;
- the implementation of the CBPWP which has been ranked by CASE and the ILO as one of the best programmes of its kind in over 30 developing countries around the world; and
- the development of various policy papers relating to both the construction and the property industries.

All of us celebrate your collective and individual success, and I urge all that remain to emulate your energy and commitment. To all the managers in the DPW, my message to you tonight is to consolidate the significant strides that we have made over the last four years and focus on refining some of the initiatives whose foundations have already been cast. This refined focus calls for a renewed commitment from all of us within the Ministry and the Department to the goals we committed ourselves to in 1994. I am confident that the high calibre of the women and men who occupy managerial positions in the Department will guarantee our consolidation plans but will also go a long way to improve our levels of service. To the personnel in the department who work at other levels, from the workers to office assistants and clerks, I want to thank them for their sterling efforts as well and to assure them of our constant consideration. Years of neglect have resulted in the potential, skills and initiative resident in so many of our employees being untapped. We must commit ourselves to greater effort to secure the development of all our people in the Department wherever they work. We can only succeed if we see ourselves as members of the same crew of the same ship, steaming on course for a better future.

I take pride in the department, its personnel and its contribution to South Africa's development. I am proud of the messages and comments I receive from many people overseas and here at home for the good work that you all do. To all of you, well done and thank you.

Siphso leaves formal government service as a DG a few months short of the period of contract. He does so after initiating discussions with me in which he outlined his reasons for wanting to move on. I have accepted those reasons with the same spirit in which they were offered, and I have no reason to doubt his integrity, neither commitment nor enthusiasm in seeing the democratic transformation of our country reach further

depths. The task of building any new society is a difficult, complex and interdependent project. South Africa's transition remains incomplete at present. All democrats have a role to play wherever their talents, expertise, energy and capacity are required. Siphoshezi's resignation from this department is not an indication in any way that his role in transformation has ended – he is moving into another sphere to face new challenges and to present a particular vision which I am sure will translate into further advances for our country as a whole.

In that endeavour, Siphoshezi, accept my personal good wishes. I am sure that I speak for all of us here and many others who could not make it tonight when I wish you and your wife and young family continued good health, prosperity, peace and happiness as you continue your collective journey along the highway of our region's transformation.

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