

Minister of Public Works
Mr J Radebe
28 May 1996

[Back](#)

At the Hand-Over of Devon Base

One of the flagships of the Department of Public Works, since I accepted office, is the National Public Works Programme, in tandem with the Reconstruction and Redevelopment Programme.

Subsequently, numerous efforts at a national level have been initiated to promote and supplement the aforementioned programmes, the latest being the National Strategic vision, with six core pillars, as presented by Executive Deputy President Mbeki during an Intergovernmental Forum on growth and development strategy. These are:

- Investing in people as the reproductive and creative core of the economy
- Creating employment on a large scale while building a powerful, internationally competitive South African economy
- Using enhanced investment in household and economic infrastructure both to facilitate growth and improve the quality of life for the poor
- A national crime-prevention and security strategy to protect the livelihood of our people, secure the wealth of the country and promote investment
- Transforming government into an efficient and responsive instrument of delivery and empowerment, able to serve all South Africans while directing government resources primarily to meet the needs of the poor majority
- Using a system of welfare "safety nets" to draw the poorest and most vulnerable groups progressively into the mainstream of the economy and society.

I believe that our NPWP programme is highly integrated with pillars such as these.

Ever since we have been exploring several avenues to apply our knowledge and expertise either as a department or in partnership with other departments.

I believe Devon Base gives us the ideal opportunity to add further substance to our endeavours in this regard, especially after Cabinet mandated a multi lateral Ministers Committee for the planning of the South African Service Corps on 6 March 1996 to promote joint ventures in training of the youth and the unemployed under the guidance of the Department of National Defence.

Other departments to serve on this committee would be Water Affairs and Forestry, Education, Labour, Safety and Security, Arts, Culture, Science and Technology and the Ministry responsible for the Reconstruction and Development Programme, apart from our respective departments.

Networking between various government departments is essential to ensure viable training and business opportunities for the youth and unemployed people. Gone are the days when we educated for ignorance! In the new South Africa and under this Government, we must ensure that every Rand that is spent will contribute to the multiplier effect on the economy. To enable this, people must be trained in these areas of the economy that will ensure sustainability such as the construction, manufacturing and business industries.

Furthermore whilst training and thereby equipping people with basic skills, it is our duty to ensure that such people are purpose-fully placed within the economic spectrum.

In other words after being trained people must have jobs either in the formal or informal sector. I don't regard people as properly trained if they cannot exist in the private sector. To enable this, a fair amount of basic business skills is vital so that small and medium entrepreneurs could work according to a simple business plan with a sound budgeting system and ability to market their skills or products. It gives me great pleasure to learn that the National Service Corps contemplates to set up a business school at Sebokeng for this very purpose as part of your operational process.

In the Department of Public Works, we have made special endeavours under the NPWP to incorporate training as an integral part of uplifting historically disadvantaged contractors. Regarding the latter a special procurement plan known as the Ten Point Plan has been approved by Cabinet to ensure the levelling of the

playing fields for all contracting firms in South Africa - especially to get the aforementioned historically disadvantaged contractors on board as well. The procurement of government contracts in the past was restricted to an elitist segment of the population. It is our commitment to ensure that the procurement process in the future must be transparent and be arranged in such a way that opportunities would open up for all small and medium entrepreneurs.

I believe the Ten Point Plan has already laid the foundation to this end.

Devon Base, where we are standing today, was established some 20 years ago for air traffic surveillance of civil and military aircraft. Devon was selected for this purpose due to its favourable locality.

It is located on one of the highest points in the Gauteng vicinity, almost 6000 feet above sea level, offering excellent conditions for radar operation. The climate offers mild summers and cold winters with more than average rainfall.

As such Devon is located in the agricultural hub of the Highveld. Devon is furthermore a mere 100 km from Pretoria and Johannesburg International Airport, and hence within easy reach of both centres.

The base is situated on two farms, 400 hectares in extent. The build up area comprises single and married accommodation for 750 persons in total. There are 20 detached dwellings and 50 duplex units. Single quarter accommodation provides for 430 persons. Extensive facilities such as a mess with a fully equipped kitchen, sick bay, nursery school, shop, Olympic size swimming pool, tennis courts, squash court, community hall and a rugby/ soccer field, with an athletic course, are also available.

Various halls with supporting office accommodation suitable for training purposes or conference facilities are in existence. The farm also offers serene nature areas such as a series of dams with braai facilities and a lapa. The complex is self supportive in terms of sewer outfall works and has Rand Water Board connections.

After Devon was utilised by the Air Force for several years, modern technology took its toll in that all monitoring and computer systems were relocated to Johannesburg International Airport in much smaller and confined areas. The base was then transferred to the Internal Stability Unit of S A P S but did not meet with their requirements.

Subsequently, the Department of Public Works took control of Devon in the middle of last year. Needless to say, the complex was in a poor state of repair regarding the grounds and the buildings.

In order to tidy up the base, the Department made special efforts to contract the services of historical disadvantaged contractors to assist in this regard.

COMPRA (the Common Prisoners Rehabilitation Agency) has successfully undertaken the renovation of three dormitories and two houses as well as the maintenance of the grounds.

Allow me to pause a while at introducing COMPRA

COMPRA was established in April 1994. The aims and objectives of the agency are the rehabilitation of so-called common-law prisoners through the Department of Correctional Services and their own rehabilitation programmes. They are also committed to encourage and recommend the provision of adequate educational facilities for the semiliterate and compulsory education for the totally illiterate prisoners.

Their members consist of qualified artisans with the potential to contribute to the upliftment of the community.

In prison, prisoners function well in teams, but their problems start once they are released.

The Department has facilitated COMPRA and historically disadvantaged contractors by allocating repair work to buildings to organised work groups. The Department initiated an assistance programme to help organise COMPRA members into sustainable private companies and business units.

Approval that office accommodation be rented to COMPRA at a nominal rental of R100,00 per year was given.

The lease for the former Post Office in Market Street, Johannesburg was signed on 31 October 1995. Due to a lack of funds the agency is not in a position to acquire telephone, facsimile or computer services and sponsorships on their behalf has been sought in the private sector.

The facilities will enable the agency to communicate with this Department, the Department of Correctional Services and other agencies regarding their programmes. However I believe, ladies and gentlemen, that they have already proved their value, dedication and skills here in Devon.

In conclusion, I believe there is still ample opportunity for joint ventures between the Service Corps and this Department to further renovate the entire complex and to make this a show piece for training and development.

My best wishes for this noble and lofty enterprise!

[top](#)