

THE NATIONAL MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, Ms THOKO DIDIZA, MP, DELIVERS AN ADDRESS ON THE OCCASION TO CELEBRATE THE SUCCESSFUL CONCLUSION OF THE 2006 NATIONAL CONSTRUCTION WEEK.

VENUE: PRESIDENTIAL GUEST HOUSE, PRETORIA

DATE: 3 AUGUST 2006

Programme Director,

Honourable Ministers and MEC's present here tonight

Honourable members of the Portfolio Committee

Senior Government Officials,

Judges of the 2014 Youth Foundation Competition

Captains of the Construction Industry

The CIDB Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson

Members of the Youth Foundation

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good Evening,

We are here tonight celebrating the end of a maiden yet successful National Construction Week campaign. The National Construction Week is an initiative of my department, in partnership with other government infrastructure departments notably the provincial departments of public works, to create awareness to the public, communities, and all other stakeholders about the importance of construction. This we do because we acknowledge that the construction industry is a national asset; a critical link in the government's value chain.

The launch of the campaign was also an attempt to get the private sector to commit to the promotion and positioning of their own industry. The acquiescence of the sector in the past has helped fuel perceptions of a robust, macho and dirty industry devoid of glamour and professionalism. Naturally operating within a competitive environment characterized by tighter profit margins, the industry overlooked image building and perception management as peripheral. The continuing loss of skilled personnel and the pressures of delivery brought by a growing order book due to

increase in construction demand has forced us to take stock of the industry with a view to market it to itself and the country. Following this initial bout of National Construction Week 2006, we look forward to seeing an even more direct involvement by the industry in the subsequent campaigns.

Through this campaign we aim to re-affirm the centrifugal role of the built environment in our life. I prefer to view *CONSTRUCTION AS PART OF OUR CULTURE*. Culture is the way of life and the way that life expresses meanings and values through its social institutions. The campaign sought to showcase the meaning and the value of construction as a powerful institution in the reconstruction and development of our country.

All the mega housing projects and other burgeoning public infrastructure that this government is undertaking to reverse the artificial backlogs of apartheid, are a case in point. Apartheid space planning deprived certain sections of our society an access to essential public infrastructure and this state of affairs accentuated their poverty. Many had to travel long distances at the mercy of both

anti-social and natural elements to receive government and other useful services.

The increasing government investment worth billion of rands in infrastructure development is largely to alleviate poverty by providing these people with buildings and structures that they never had. As part of National Integrated Crime Prevention Strategy, the Department of Public Works between 1999 and 2004, built multi million rand Community Safety Centres in almost all the provinces, bringing these one-stop crime management facilities, for the first time, nearer to the deserving communities. This was at the same time that government was rolling-out the Multi Purpose Community Centres (MPCC's) which dispensed with essential services such as social development, home affairs, universal telecommunications access and many others. Recently the private sector has been establishing shopping malls in the previously disadvantaged townships including Umlazi near Durban and Sebokeng to the south of Johannesburg.

The relevance of this industry stretches beyond just begetting concrete structures. Construction as an art form also bequeathes our landscape with exquisite aesthetics. The famous skylines in the

world including Manhattan, Sidney and Hong Kong, are the products of the imaginative men and women of construction. These architectural and town planning wonders appeal to our artistic instincts and create centres of national pride and international tourism market.

World famous civilizations were literally built on strong foundations laid by this industry, from the awe-inspiring Pyramids of ancient Egypt, and the marvelous shrines of the central American Incas, to the majestic Muwenomutapa structures of the great Zimbabwean kingdom. This is all the magnificence we seek to glorify and the sentiment we want to elicit with the National Construction Week . I think we have succeeded in igniting the spark. In the next year we shall hope to see a greater involvement by the civil society.

In preparation for the launch of the Construction Week, we implemented a comprehensive media advertising campaign highlighting construction as a career choice of destination – one that is exciting and appealing to young people. This is done through initiatives such as the National Construction Week, the 2014 Youth

Foundation, the Military Skills Development, and other learnership programmes. We even took the *Take A Girl Child* Campaign and made it a prelude for the National Construction Week in terms of key messages and other themes. This is because we believe that, as they say in IsiZulu, INKUNZI ISEMATHOLENI. Literally this translates to the belief that calves are bulls-in-waiting. In our case it means that our future hope in terms of skills replenishment, leadership and succession, can be found among these youths.

During the National Construction Week, more than 50 events were held nationwide, thanks to the concerted efforts of government, the private sector and our public entities such as the Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), the Independent Development Trust (IDT) and the Council for the Built Environment (CBE). These ranged from the Interbuild Exhibitions at Nasrec to the various site visits where our children were given first hand account of the intricacies of the construction industry. Many were given practical experiences in matters construction. These experiences buoyed by the comprehensive media plan, managed to raise awareness but also created expectations. The National Construction Week call centre, I

am informed, was inundated with young people looking for employment. I want to challenge the industry to walk the talk. Let us take these young people on learnerships, provide them with bursaries to study further, but most importantly, employ them in line with the slogan for this year's campaign, of helping them **“build their dreams.”**

The current boom in the industry provides us, both government and the industry, with an opportunity to demonstrate the extent to which this industry is both willing and able to transform itself given the correct enabling environment. The number of big projects being planned and implemented is a barometer of growth, signaling both opportunities and real challenges. However, people build projects and the industry's insistence to build people is a long term vision and a worthwhile investment.

This industry contributes 13.7 % to GDP (from the 2006 first quarter report), and another contribution to other social development indices including improved public service delivery. The Expanded Public Works Programme for instance, is creating much needed depth in the

industry. The recently launched EPWP Vukuphile Contractor and Supervisor Learnership programme is building a corps of accredited industry players in the provision of basic infrastructure so urgently required to expedite service delivery particularly at local government level.

However, to ensure that this growth continues and expands, we need skilled people. In fact the industry needs twice as many skilled people as it currently has. My appeal remains that let us invest in training and skills development while creating an industry with a reputation for high quality performance and effective project delivery. We need a strong economy to generate employment but we also need a diverse industry that is successful, competitive and secured to drive that growth.

In concluding, I am reminded of the story about President John F Kennedy in the early 1960s. He was inspecting the space rocket and satellite launch facilities at Cape Canaveral. Seeing a man working he asked him, "What do you do – sweep the floors, put the nuts and

bolts in, build the rigging?” The man replied, “Oh, I’m putting a man on the moon.” We must have ambition and vision. Never lose sight of what you are building for, and what it means to the community as a whole.” Next time we see workers in overalls pushing wheelbarrows full of mortar, let us remember that they are laying concrete foundations for the sustainable development of Africa and its people.

I THANK YOU.