

/Embargoed until delivery/

**A GALA DINNER HOSTED IN HONOUR OF MINISTER SN  
SIGCAU AND THE MEMBERS OF MINMEC**

Remarks by

The Hon. MB Gwala MPP  
Minister of Works: KwaZulu-Natal

---

**ROYAL HOTEL, DURBAN**

**01 DECEMBER 05**

---

Programme Director, Deputy Minister of Public Works Mr. NM Kganyago-MP, MECs for Public Works from other Provinces of our country, Dr S Phillips and all provincial Heads of Departments, other senior officials of the Department of Public Works, ladies and gentlemen

I am pleased to be with you today to host our last MINMEC meeting for the year 2005. The lot of hosting this MINMEC meeting fell to my Province at a point in the year when each and everyone of us is looking forward to that time of relaxing with their families and recuperate, and get ready for yet another busy year ahead. This is the time when many of us normally pause to take stock of how they fared during the year about to end.

We share similar problems that come with our shared mandate of service delivery to our people as determined by the scope of Public Works Department, whether at the national or provincial level. This leaves me with no option but to refer briefly to some of these

problems common to all of us. I am certain you are all aware that Public Works as a department has never been a darling of the media. Newspaper headlines such as **“Scrap this Works Department”** or **“a bent spanner still lurks in the Works”** will remain a common feature of journalism in the foreseeable future. If you have been a victim of that treatment by the media recently, take comfort in the knowledge that you are certainly not alone. You can count on me in that company of victims.

I am certain our National Minister has been at the receiving end of this kind of unfair treatment from the media. In some media columns she was even given a certain grade of performance in that particular year. They rush to make judgment on us to the point of suggesting who will be retaining a Cabinet post and who will or must be shown the gate and yet they are not accountable to the electorate that they bent on deceiving now and then. We are proud to see that a mature politician of Ms Sigcau’s caliber is in charge of the Public Works portfolio.

Having a vigilant media like that is good for our democracy. Unfortunately the media’s supposed passion for “public interest” is seldom balanced by an equal eagerness to provide equal space for responses to such eye-catching phrases, because our responses to the same issues that were raised by the media in the first place are somehow deemed to be not newsworthy. Whatever happens to that “public interest” remains a mystery to me. That is why my

Department's response to the headlines I have referred to earlier on have never seen the light of the day.

I am certain many of us here can remember what the circumstances were when I took over the responsibility of the Public Works portfolio. I was the first to admit that all was not well with this Department. I made a commitment to the Legislature that with the back-up of all the employees in the Department, it was possible to transform the Department from its dysfunctional state, into a well-functioning organization. That was eight months ago.

I initiated the Change Agenda, a departmental turn-around strategy whereby I would be able to report progress by May 2006. The following are the six main priorities of my Change Agenda:

- Transformation of the Department into a high performing organization;
- Redesign of the department's service delivery model to effectively, efficiently and timeously meet client expectations;
- Development of new partnerships and service delivery agreements with client departments;
- Fast tracked development and implementation of a new flagship programme for elimination of the classroom backlog;

- Development and implementation of a provincial Fixed Asset Management System; and
- Full engagement of the Expanded Public Works Programme.

I demand nothing less than total commitment to these priorities by all members of staff in my department. I have put my head on the block and set timelines by when there would be specific deliverables on what we undertook to do. Indications are that the goal we have set ourselves is indeed an achievable one, as long as we all together give it our best shot.

We have also committed ourselves to producing a Fixed Asset Register by May 2006. I know this is one area that has remained a perennial problem to most of us. As a highly technical Department we have another problem that simply does not want to go away, that of filling Technical posts on our organization structure.

Although apartheid is dead and buried, its legacy is still very much part of our daily experience. The backlog in the number of technically qualified people that are needed is going to remain with us for some years to come. The problem does not start right there but it goes right back to the kind of education and career guidance available to our children. It was with this background that on the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2005, my Department launched an Internship Programme whereby students who are studying towards Architecture, Civil Engineering, Quantity Survey etc. could be provided with opportunities for internship and be

mentored within our Department with a hope that when they qualify they will come back and seek employment in our Department.

But just as I finish that statement another million dollar question that comes up is whether we have **a salary package that will ensure retention of such highly technical and scarce skills?** I want to believe that this is a problem facing not only the KwaZulu-Natal provincial department of Public Works. Am I correct? If anyone could tell me of the appropriate forum where to raise this matter, I would be more than willing to do what would be permissible for me to ensure that this matter receives the urgent attention it deserves. This is more the case because I do not believe that importing skills is the best and lasting solution to this problem because our own people do not become empowered in the process.

That is why I feel we must try and influence a change of attitude in our learners. For example I think girls must be encouraged to follow subject streams previously considered to be “male subjects” and carve a niche for themselves in the previously male-dominated professions. I am convinced that women economic contribution will, for a number of reasons, have a greater impact towards the general welfare of our homes.

Within a period of three months to this day, my Department has had the opportunity to host two Construction Industry conferences. The first one was held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> September 2005 aimed at celebrating the Women Month by targeting women in construction. What we

learned from that exercise will become evident as we tackle some of the recommendations that emerged there.

On the 31<sup>st</sup> October – 1<sup>st</sup> November 2005 my Department hosted another conference that was open to all those who are in the construction industry and those who want to enter it, and which was officially opened by the Deputy Minister of Public Works Mr. NM Kganyago. At a dinner addressed by the Premier of KwaZulu-Natal, we learned that there is a lot we can do as a Department to address the needs of our people as we turn many challenges of the past neglect into opportunities.

The Premier mentioned amongst other things the lack of infrastructure and other public amenities in the previously disadvantaged section of our society. He also referred to the growth potential that will come with the preparations for the 2010 World Cup Soccer Tournament as well as the challenges of urban renewal and growth.

Furthermore, on behalf of the government, we have a responsibility to ensure that planning for new buildings meet the requirements for the disabled citizens of our country. In addition to staircases there must be ramps and toilets with wide doors for wheel-chair users, lifts must be equipped with floor number buttons that have Braille characters for use by the blind people, and so on and so forth. Old buildings have to be modified. Failure to make these provisions is tantamount to denying our fellow citizens their civil rights.

Apart from such opportunities, the Department of Public Works, through construction industry, is better placed to influence or make a significant contribution to the economic growth since they are a backbone of the economy not merely in terms of what they spend on shopping, but because of their responsible expenditure compared to men. I challenge anyone here to investigate and ascertain how much percentage of a man or woman's take-home pay (or net pay) is spent on domestic requirements!!!

My plea to our parent Department in Pretoria is on an improved work relationship between the national and the provinces, particularly in the area of community infrastructure projects, whereby the left hand must know what the right hand is doing. For instance I am aware that early on there were certain projects under the CBPWP that were funded by the National Department through the local municipalities, a process that turned provincial departments literally into spectators! May I add that it does not help to look for one another only when problems develop around those projects.

This evening event was not meant for long speeches but as an occasion to relax as we together take stock of our successes and failures as a Department of Public Works. It is a pity that our Minister could not be with us today due to indisposition. We wish her a speedy recovery!

I have known Minister Sigcau as a down to earth person, whose Royal descent serves as a catalyst rather than an impediment in her interaction with general people on matters of development. Another special attribute of hers is the fact that with her, political partisanship takes the back seat and she allows service to the people to occupy the centre stage.

With those few words I want to welcome you all to this evening function. I want to express my gratefulness to the Honourable Mr. NM Kganyago who is present with us this evening as we look forward to a successful MINMEC meeting tomorrow. I thank you.

-----