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THE 2ND ANNUAL WOMEN-IN-CONSTRUCTION CONFERENCE

Remarks by the Honourable **M.B. Gwala-MPP**

Minister of Public Works: KwaZulu-Natal

DURBAN

21 AUGUST 2006

Programme Directors; Mrs. S. Linda & Mrs. F.F. Thabede

I am delighted to see many Women Contractors attending the 2nd Annual Women-in-Construction Conference this year, especially during the Month of August which is identified as the month for Women in this country.

I am sure many of you who attended last year's event will agree with me when I say this conference has created a platform for women to engage with one another and also share their experiences on matters related to the industry, which is widely recognized as the driving force for the stimulation of growth, and job creation in the country.

It is common knowledge that in the past the Black community particularly women, were largely excluded from participating in the main stream of the economy.

While there are many challenges in this regard, my Department in consultation with relevant stakeholders wants to ensure that transformation is achieved as speedily as possible. As a Department we are also doing our part in this regard.

For example the number of women in senior managerial positions has increased dramatically since I took over the portfolio of Public Works. For example the Head of Department, Senior Manager Real Estate and Professional Services, the Manager: Human Resource, the Manager: Legal Services, the Manager: supply Chain Management, are all women.

Even in the technical side of things we have a lady who has acted as Chief Architect for quite some time now. All of that is a demonstration of our commitment and seriousness about transformation. It is for this reason that my department has organized this platform for dialogue as an attempt to encourage women participation in the construction sector.

I was encouraged to learn that in the past financial year, more tenders were awarded to women contractors in response to the resolutions that were adopted at our first women in construction conference in September last year. In addition, during the first quarter of this financial year (2006/07) alone my Department has spent more than R32 million in this regard.

I hope that the discussions held last year provided the necessary foundation for the future development of women contractors in this Province. I am also certain that this gathering will expand on resolutions that were adopted last year. My Department has strategies already in place to fast track this move. One of those strategies is to ensure that women benefit from at least 60% of awarded Construction tender.

We have realized the critical role of women in our society and that our vision to remain market leaders in the provision of public property and facilities in the KwaZulu-Natal Province, will be meaningless if women who constitute the larger percentage of the population are left behind..

Our mission to provide cost effective, competitive construction and real estate management services in an efficient, effective and equitable manner cannot be achieved with the exclusion of women in the industry. While this is the case, there are other critical issues which are still a cause for concern in our communities.

Those issues are unemployment, poverty, the scourge of HIV / AIDS, homelessness and the glaring infrastructural deficiencies. As Government, we are expected by the electorate to provide meaningful answers to these problems, and yet we are limited by rules and regulations, as well as by budgetary constraints.

Our Extended Public Works Programme, seeks to provide answers to these problems. Through the EPWP, we are hoping to create a number of short-term job opportunities and also contribute to skills training and infrastructure development. For example, in terms of the EPWP job creation targets for the Financial Year 2005/06 we as a department had set for ourselves a target of 10 000 jobs which we have exceeded by 25% because 12 280 jobs were created.

My department is also aware of the challenge facing the entire country, that is, to provide more job opportunities and attempt to halve the unemployment rate by 2014. This can be achieved through continuous engagement between Government Departments, the Private Sector, and many other relevant stakeholders.

Let us use all avenues such as the forthcoming 2010 Soccer World Cup to build the infrastructure and also create more jobs for the nation. We need to consolidate our efforts and pull our sleeves to ensure that these challenges are dealt with accordingly.

What is encouraging is the fact that Government has created an enabling regulatory framework through the Broad-Based, Black Economic Empowerment Act of 2003 and the Broad-Based BEE codes which make a provision for Black entrepreneurs' entry into the business environment. The role of business and its participation is crucial in strengthening our delivery efforts through public private partnerships.

Undoubtedly, the Public Private Partnerships will be boosted by the genuine participation of all stakeholders. I want to assure the Private Sector Representatives attending this Conference on Women-in Construction that my Department is committed to solid and efficient governance.

Through our new turn-around strategy called CHANGE AGENDA, my department is firmly on its way to meet the challenges of the present and the future. This new policy is the blue-print to transform the Department into a reputable and performing organization in the Province.

Since this policy (sometimes referred to as the "CHORUS") was adopted by the Head of Department, Dr F.B. Madlopha and the Senior Managers, there is synergy in our operations and the Department has focused activities to meet the challenge of Accelerated Service Delivery, which is our main priority during this Financial year.

We are fully committed and ready to diligently meet client requirements for prompt and well managed high quality infrastructure, while at the same time ensuring that our social delivery models becomes a reality for the benefit of the people of KwaZulu-Natal.

I urge all of you present here today to engage with my Department, and seek advice on how we can be of assistance to you. My Department is there to serve you.

Lastly, I would like to salute the pioneer who fought gallantly for the participation of Women in the Construction sector, the late former Public Works Minister, Princess Stella Sigcau who ensured that women play a critical role in the Construction sector. By so doing, she laid a foundation for future.

*As she correctly stated, Princess Sigcau said **“women are under-represented in the Construction sector”** and that **“there is an urgent need to fast track their participation in the industry”**.*

Let us move on and ensure the maximum participation of women in the Construction sector and pull together towards building our Province for the future generations.

“ASISEBENZE KUGUG’ IFOSHOLO”

THANK YOU.