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Address to the Women In Construction Forum by the MEC for Public Works, Roads and Transport, Mahlakeng Mahlakeng, Mafikeng, on Friday, August 19.

Date: Friday, August 19, 2011

- Programme Director
- Chief Director Corporate Services
- Mr Jeeevan Kashmera, from Standards Bank
- Mr Moses Hlongoane, from SARS
- Ms Thembi Motau, from the Construction Industry Development Board
- Ladies and gentlemen

Good day to you all.

My profound appreciation goes to colleagues in my Chief Directorate Corporate Service, who found it appropriate to afford me a platform to make a contribution to this workshop.

It is indeed a privilege, and I very grateful for the opportunity.

The historical significance of August month, observed as a rallying point to symbolise the roles played by women in the struggle for the liberation of this country, is well documented and known to all of us.

It is how we move forward, as the country and its people, to keep the momentum in creating a better life for all. Building on same the foundations and walking on very same footprints that were left behind by the heroines of our struggles.

There is no development strategy, more beneficial to society as a whole - women and men alike - than the one which involves women as central players.

We have indeed moved, as a Department of Public Works, Roads and Transport, in recognising and realising that the empowerment of women constitutes the empowerment of our entire community.

In August last year, we launched the Women in Construction Forum, as an ideal platform to bring you, your members and would-be members closer to us.

Once we achieve that, we will understand each other much better, and begin to create an environment where we can begin to work together in partnership.

To built on the legacies left behind by the stalwarts of our revolution, especially the women brigade who led from the front-lines we cannot afford to fail in our quest to succeed.

To this end, Programme Director:

We are scheduled to sign a Memorandum of Agreement with the forum on 3rd September 2011. This agreement outlines the terms of reference of the Forum and the support the Department will give in areas of capacity building and creating an enabling environment so that women may strive towards a better life for themselves.

The Memorandum of Agreement has been perused by the Executive Members of the Forum, as well as the relevant stakeholders in the Department.

It is therefore representative of the views of both the Department and Forum, and what each party will do to ensure that this Forum and formal the structure bears fruit for the women of the province in the construction sector.

It is on occasions like this, programme director, when I get inspired by words of the former United Nations General Secretary, Kofi Annan, when he once said:

“Gender equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance”.

It therefore means, we cannot just continue speak of women empowerment and development as if it is a fashion.

Countries across the globe have understood that women's equality is a prerequisite for development are not an exception.

Development and empowerment of women has to seen and felt in the workplace, and must be cascaded down to the opening of opportunities in all spheres of life in order for them to make a meaningful contribution.

Contribution can only be meaningful, when it makes a difference and impacts on lives of others. In short, be of service to the people.

Whether you make yourself available to a friend or co-worker, or you make time every month to do volunteer work, there is nothing that harvests more of a feeling of empowerment than being of service to someone in need.

The forum I mentioned earlier is our initiative to create a platform for you, to establish where you can fit in our plans in order for you to be of service to this country.

To create space, so that you make a meaningful contribution in improving the lives of our people because together, we can do more.

The levels of poverty, joblessness still pose a very serious challenge in our democracy and for us in this province; this is compounded by fact that, ours is largely a rural province. You cannot turn a blind eye to that reality and you have to assist in turning the tide.

This forum should not be misunderstood, to suggest in any way whatsoever, that being a member, is a ticket or an entitlement to have an unfair advantage over others.

It is not, and will never be a short-cut to winning a government contract or tender. I hope that is clear.

If we do that, we will not only be breaking the law of the country.

We will also be making a mockery of the noble struggles and sacrifices made by women of this country. The struggle they fought was not in return for favours, but a struggle for the recognition of women as revolutionaries and liberators.

Programme Director:

Workshops like this for women in construction should be held more often.

It cannot be correct to meet with the department as a collective only during the month of August.

For us to be seen to be working in partnership there has to be regular contact to assess and monitor the progress we are making.

We are ready to support you, see you grow as an active empowered participant who is passionate about this province and its people.

We will continue, where possible create opportunities and environment where you too can compete and grow from being emerging to something higher than that.

It cannot be correct for an emerging contractor to be emerging forever. There must come a point when something that emerges stops emerging and that is one critical area which we are addressing as a department.

We are creating an enabling environment to graduate from being emerging into an established contractor.

Our new approach as a department is to collapse the monopoly enjoyed by well established by companies with regards to government tenders.

This also applies to established black companies who, maybe through sheer luck, are successful bidders.

We have resolved to unbundle major projects in order to give other people, especially people like you and opportunity to grow by handling major projects.

This we have done already in appointing two contractors to finish the remainder of the work on the road between Koster and Lichtenburg.

I would want to see more and more women taking advantage of that intervention we are making in creating a space for growth.

However, this deliberate approach to unbundle projects for more and more people to develop, comes with a huge responsibility.

We are not going to tolerate shoddy workmanship and or poor performance, just because you are an emerging contractor.

While we are going to make it a point that payments to contractors are effected on time, we must deliver the best quality which you can also be proud of, and which will make the people of the North West to ask more from you.

Good luck and thanks for the opportunity.

END