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Keynote Address by the Minister of Public Works, Ms Thoko Didiza on the occasion of the North West Provincial Launch of the National Youth Service

Date: Friday, April 18, 2008

- o Programme Director
- o Honourable Premier
- o MEC's Present
- o Members of the Legislature
- o Executive Mayors and Speakers of Municipalities
- o Councilors
- o Senior Government Officials
- o CEO's of Public Entities
- o Invited guests
- o Ladies and Gentlemen

I would like to start off by greeting the people about whom we have gathered here today, the trailblazers of the National Youth Service.

Heita basha, heita

Phambili nge skills development, phambili

Forward with Youth Development, Forward

It gives one great pleasure to be here this morning to witness yet another great stride being taken on the road to skills development and youth empowerment in our country. As we have said right from the beginning when we launched the NYS in Botshabelo in Bloemfontein in April last year, the National Youth Service is not only about providing skills to the youth. Through the NYS we are building a cadre of young people who are prepared to put ahead the interests of their country. We want to develop in the young people that we are inducting into the NYS today, an ethos that says I will put my country first and develop it to its fullest potential. Yes, we will teach these young people how to lay bricks, paint, plumb and weld. But we also want them to be proud South African citizens, ready to put their all in a national effort to improve their country.

Ladies and gentlemen, this provincial launch today is a first step on the long road to satisfying our country's great need for artisans as well as providing our youth with an opportunity to get started as employed people as well as being entrepreneurs.

During the state of the Nation Address in Parliament earlier this year, President Mbeki indicated that government has great faith in the Expanded Public Works Programme in

meeting its objectives of creating job opportunities and creating a firm skills base for artisans in our country.

I believe that we are on course with the NYS, as part of the EPWP, in spite of teething problems that we have faced in the first year of piloting this initiative. In fact my optimism was vindicated last week when we graduated the first batch of NYS learners at Edenburg in the Free State. Two hundred and ninety five learners graduated from the Free State and the Northern Cape. We are very proud of all the hard work that has been put in this effort and the first fruit are showing.

Honoured guests, our government assets, particularly our buildings, give us a particular leverage to be used to create employment for the youth. We are aiming for a skills revolution and empowerment for our youth. The young people who are being recruited to this programme will also be enrolled with our Further Education Colleges and those industry colleges as artisan trainees so that at the end of their national youth service they would have given their service to their country whilst gaining valuable skills for themselves as well.

The event today provides a beacon of hope for the youth of our country. It is also a clarion call for them to pick themselves up and make use of all the opportunities that are being availed to them for self-improvement and that of their country.

Service delivery, poverty eradication and job creation are paramount objectives of government. The National Youth Service is one of our strategies to deliver on these objectives. The maintenance and provision of infrastructure are some of the tactics. These areas of activity will create work opportunities for the youth that has been selected, but they will also help improve the skills base of the province.

Our focus on the construction sector and allied sectors takes full cognizance of the immense potential of the industry as a creator of job opportunities. Under the impact of growing investment and the EPWP, employment in the construction sector has risen greatly. With construction output set to double in the foreseeable future, the industry has the potential to generate thousands of jobs by 2014, contributing greatly to the goals of accelerated growth. Many of those who will be employed, will need to be skilled. That is why we have put this initiative in place.

Indeed our country is in a grip of a great skills shortage and need. Our country is in the throes of a massive infrastructure development and improvement programme. With growth rates in construction spend of around 10% per annum, the highest that it has been in the last 30 years, construction spend is in fact growing at a higher rate than Gross Domestic Product. However, there are many challenges that need to be tackled in a range of public and private sector partnerships to further unlock infrastructure bottlenecks and to create capacity and skills.

The challenges in the built environment are huge and need urgent attention as the deadlines are so tight as well. Even as the government accelerates the infrastructure

development, the demographic profile of registered built environment professionals is a long way from reflecting the demographics of the country. As the economy begins to boom with upward trends predicted well beyond 2010, there are increasing demands for professional services, and the pool of skills represented by built environment professions should increase accordingly. However, current trends, with specific reference to the built professions, indicate that this important skills base is in decline, with very few new entrants compared to the large numbers who are leaving the profession. That is why it is vitally important to continuously and urgently replenish the human resources in the built environment with young, enthusiastic and determined young people. This initiative could not have come at a more appropriate time in our development.

I want to acknowledge the work that has been undertaken by the province in recruiting and selecting this first batch of NYS participants that we are inducting today. It takes a lot of work and dedication to set up the systems and get the process going at great pace to meet the targets, especially tight targets like those that have been put for this first intake of NYS participants.

Fellow South Africans, I firmly believe that with the launch of this programme, we are on course to meet our targets. All three spheres of government are forever looking for ways to better coordinate this programme and I believe that the uptake across the board can only improve from now on. Our collective effort and dedication will see us through the challenging tasks we are facing as a country. I would like to congratulate these young people who have been selected for this programme. I would like to sound a word of caution: this will not be an easy and nice experience for the learners. There always are challenges and there always are problems. But as someone has said, it does not matter how many times you fall, what matters is how many times you get up, dust yourself off and move forward until you reach your goal. Our challenge today is to ensure that those that have been selected keep to the task at hand and make us all proud at the end of the twelve months in this programme.

I am sure that everyone is aware of the strides we have made in the last 14 years of our democracy. And it is exactly for those successes that we cannot allow our country to regress because of the scourge of poverty and underdevelopment. And surely the acceleration of the NYS will ensure that we defeat these twin challenges in our country.

Once again I would like to congratulate everyone involved and wish you the best in all the work that lies ahead.

Thank you.

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