



Cuban advisors to get English lessons.

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By Oupa Segalwe

Plans are underway to organise basic English lessons for the six Cuban technical advisors who joined the North West Public Works department two months ago to bridge the skills gap currently occurring in the built-environment.

These experts are fluent in Spanish but struggle with the English medium and as a result there has been a communication barrier between them and their colleagues within the Buildings Directorate.

In this regard, the department has been holding talks with various potential service providers including among others the University of North West and the International School of South Africa.

Speaking during a special welcome lunch with the group today at the Mafikeng Hotel School, MEC Jerry Thibedi said it was imperative for the departmental officials to learn Spanish as much as it was for the technical advisers to study English.

“We are convinced that language is not going to be much of a barrier as you will be learning English. However it is important for us to take Spanish lessons as well for smooth communication,” Thibedi said.

Currently the officials communicate by using both sign and body language in order to be understood. They also refer to their Spanish /English pocket dictionaries from time to time.

They boast critical construction skills and are expected to reinforce capacity and top it up with mentoring and skills transfer among officials and young people in the built-environment during their three-year stay with the department.

About 57 of them arrived in the country from Cuba in January and have been shared by Public Works departments across the country.

Their coming to South Africa followed the signing of a Memorandum of Agreement in Havana, between Public Works Minister Thoko Didiza and Cuban Minister for Construction Fidel Segeroa de la Paz in July last year.

Since assuming duty on February 11, the officials have been visiting several construction sites where Public Works is handling building projects on behalf of its client departments.

These projects include among others Moses Kotane and Potchefstroom Hospitals, Tlapeng, Lesego and Kgokgole Clinics, Reamogetswe Secure Care Center and Sonop Old Age Home.

Thibedi said the group's arrival occurred at the time when the country is experiencing a severe shortage of critical skills in various construction disciplines.

“This shortage has led to a situation where available professionals are moving away from the public service to the private sector simply because the latter offers highly competitive remuneration,” he said.

The MEC commended the group for their willingness to contribute to government's skills development programme. However, he called on those who will be receiving the skills to “show commitment and go an extra mile” for effective learning.

The leader of the team and Architect Jose Alfredo Ibanez Mestre said while they were here to transfer skills, they were also hoping to learn from their South African colleagues.

“We also wish to contribute to the development of the North West province,” he added.

Apart from Mestre, the group comprises Civil Engineers Ana Isabel Pardo Jimenez and Lisbet Leornard Alvarez ; Architect Rudolf Alberto Cuevas Gandaria; Chief Architect Joan Javier Albo Alonso and Electrical Engineer Lorenzo Cuellar.

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Issued by Communication Directorate
Contact Person: **Matshube Mfoloe**
Contact Number: (018) 387 2447 / 0823054594
E-mail: mmfoloe@nwpg.gov.za

