

The Minister of Public Works, Ms Thoko Didiza, gives an address at the occasion to launch the EPWP National Youth Service

Venue: Botshabelo Stadium, Bloemfontein, Free State

Date: Saturday 14 April 2007

- Deputy President, Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka,
- Premier of the Free State, Ms Beatrice Marshoff
- Members of the Executive Council and the Provincial Legislature
- All the Executive Mayors and Councillors present
- Representatives of our political parties, non-governmental and community based organizations
- Senior government management and leadership
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

In just 2 weeks from now, on the 27th of April 2007 our country will be celebrating its 13th birthday of democratic rule. On the 27th April, we will celebrate freedom, we will mark the progress made on our journey of transformation, and we will recommit ourselves to the ongoing task of creating a better life for the people of South Africa.

Today we celebrate another milestone on that journey, as we launch the EPWP National Youth Service Programme, a programme of

commitment to the youth, and also a programme of commitment by the youth of our country to serve the people of South Africa.

Madam Deputy President,

Today's launch also marks the commitment of Public Works at national and provincial level in response to President Thabo Meki's call to boost the scope and impact of government's Expanded Public Works Programme (EPWP). The EPWP Youth Service Programme is therefore a joint initiative with the Umsobomvu Youth Fund, the Department of Labour and the Provincial Departments of Public Works.

Together we will increase the number of young people engaged in the National Youth Service by 20 000. Public Works' contribution to the NYS will include the recruitment and built environment skills training of no less than 10 000 unemployed youth and graduates (5000 each by National and Provincial Public Works Departments). The Amongst us today are many of the first new recruits, pioneers of the EPWP contribution to the National Youth Service as announced by the President in his State of the Nation Address. I would like to welcome you and

Ladies and gentlemen

When the President made his call to ratchet up the scope and impact of the Expanded Public Works Programme and to support the NYS, we asked ourselves as Public Works how we could use our mandate to achieve these objectives.

In the first instance we identified significant untapped potential within the capital and maintenance programmes of public works and we have restructured our procurement, management and monitoring practices to ensure that the labour intensive principles of the EPWP are incorporated in these projects.

We also began to shape a programme and a vision to support the growth and development of our youth, as well as their ability to contribute to South Africa's ongoing journey of transformation.

So far the National Department of Public Works has identified 64 building projects with a total value of R3 billion to kickstart the NYS. Provinces have begun to select their own projects. The bulk of the 5000 recruits will receive artisan training the building and construction trades.

When they have completed their experiential training, some of these young people will remain in the employ of government, some will be absorbed in the construction industry and others will be assisted to start their own businesses.

The National Department has also identified the potential to employ and mentor about 260 unemployed built environment graduates, to ensure that they obtain the necessary experiential training to enable them to complete their qualifications and register as built environment professionals. Provinces are reviewing their potential to do likewise.

In reviewing our potential to contribute to the NYS, we have also recognized the significant potential of our own maintenance programmes. We believe that those young people who choose to remain in Public Works after completion of their experiential training can play an important role in helping us to improve the quality of maintenance of public infrastructure.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our vision for the EPWP National Youth Service is about elevating the role and contribution of young people to the building of our new society. Both those that graduate, as well as those that are already established in the construction and built environment sectors will not just be the beneficiaries of this programme, but will also be called upon to lead and contribute to its implementation, expansion and further development.

In this context it is particularly pleasing that we are launching the EPWP NYS Programme in this Province, which has already commenced with the Free State Community Care Youth Service Project, enabling 410 young people a career path as Community Care Workers and, at the same time enabling them to make a practical impact in their communities. Inter-alia they will assist in addressing the needs of patient care (including HIV/ AIDS), the needs of child headed households and in linking families and care givers with poverty alleviation programmes and community services.

Ahead we see exciting opportunities in the NYS for both graduates, professionals and school leavers to contribute some time and effort to the tasks of government at all levels, national, provincial and municipal. We therefore see the need to begin to create a database that can match the potential needs around the country with potential short-term and/or part-time contributors – namely those who are prepared and committed to ploughing back something into the soil of the new South Africa.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today we are launching much more than just another programme, I believe we are creating the platform for today's youth to address the current challenges of our country and to take forward the journey of South Africa's transformation. The "*long walk to freedom*" continues in the building of our new democracy and Public Works is committed to placing our youth at the centre of this journey.

I thank you.