

# **BUILT ENVIRONMENT READIES FOR 2010 AND YEARS TO COME**

**Council for Built Environment's (CBE) Inaugural 2008 Built Environment Symposium ends on a high note following two days of informative and thought provoking inputs**

The Council of the Built Environment (CBE) convened its inaugural annual Built Environment Symposium from 14 to 15 May 2008 at Gallagher Estate, Midrand. Participants included employers and labour, established and emerging sectors, constructors and materials suppliers, clients and financiers, contractors and subcontractors, designers, professionals and educators.

The event was mainly intended to serve as a platform through which players in the built environment sectors can highlight current concerns and explore possible solutions.

A highlight of the event was presentation of honorary awards by the Minister of Public Works, Ms Thoko Didiza at a jubilant gala dinner which also served as the closing ceremony of the event.

"The Symposium theme 'Asserting Relevance in a Booming Built Environment' aptly captures the central role of your organization in the provision of infrastructure and the correct positioning of the sector for social and economic development" said the Minister. She further added that "Construction creates the foundations of our global economy and the basis for human advancement. It also accounts for about ten percent of the global economy and provides much needed employment and dignity to millions of people around the world".

The Minister used the opportunity to reflect on current legislative processes regarding reconfiguration of the built environment playing field.

'Eight years after the setting up of the Built Environment Councils, we have had to take stock and check whether any progress is being made with regards to the national imperatives. We have had to grapple with issues of access to the professions, shortcomings in the regulatory model, as well as the need for the organized professions to serve the imperatives of development, equity and access." The Minister identified governance, financial accountability and lack of financial resources as part of challenges to be addressed.

She further states "We have seen all sorts of allegations and innuendos in the media, coming from certain individuals and councils...some of which have been blatant untruths, aimed at stampeding the councils into a state of morbid fear for their survival."

“I would like to state this here and say to everyone: the document that has been produced by the Department of Public Works, aims to stimulate debate regarding regulation of the professions going forward. It has been compiled and published for public comment to elicit the views of the public and stakeholders at large. Legislative changes will only follow on the comments received on that policy document from the public as well as on further consultations with relevant stakeholders”.

The symposium took place against a background of a built environment sector with growth prospects expected to persist beyond the year 2010. This is more so as South Africa is currently engaged in a massive infrastructure development and improvement programme. For example, in the construction sector, growth rates in spending are over ten (10) percent a year, the highest it has ever been in the last thirty (30) years. This rate is also higher than the Gross Domestic Product.

It was noted that with this positive picture also comes challenges. These include lack of required capacity and skills, need to improve the promotion of the SME business sector and black economic empowerment, improve employment conditions as well as assert the role of women. By exchanging experiences and through dialogue, the event challenged delegates to look at ways to overcome some of these constraints.

“Most comforting is that we have been set in our efforts to try and understand these challenges with an eye of finding meaningful solutions. If properly defined and adequately addressed, our response to these challenges would ensure our country claims its rightful place as a world leader in the built environment sector” said CBE Chairperson, Siphso Madonsela.

The Minister handed over three (3) honorary awards to role players for their exceptional contributions to the sector. The awards are in the categories of:-

- 2008 Renowned Woman Leadership and Empowerment Award which was handed over to Elizabeth O’ Leary, Executive Director of Women for Housing. This award recognises leadership and empowerment which shows innovation and consistency in contribution towards enabling women’s participation in the built environment sector. Emphasis was also on case studies which can prove actual benefit sharing.
- 2008 Exemplary Youth and Skills Intervention which was handed over to the South African Institution of Civil Engineering. This award is for persons or institutions or projects that have been exemplary in spearheading youth development and executing skills development interventions. The outcomes of interventions should be evident through tangible results.
- 2008 Renowned Built Environment Research Institute which was handed over to CSIR’s Built Environment Section. This award is for an institution

or person whose research efforts are supportive of agreed national goals and priorities. These would particularly reflect in general terms to issues identified through the Apex priorities and specifically be research whose outcomes can be implemented to further the development of the built environment sector and set South Africa as a world leader.

The intention is to convene the symposium as an annual event that enables South Africa to come up with world-class solutions to challenges posed by the built environment sector.

End.