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CESA MEDIA ADDRESS: 2024 SPEECH

A Call for Diverse and Collaborative Leadership - Stronger Together to Secure a Sustainable Future for All!

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you for gathering here today as we embark on a new chapter in the history of Consulting Engineers South Africa. It is both an honour and a privilege to stand before you as the new President of this organisation, and I am humbled by the trust and confidence that our member companies have placed in me.

Allow me to begin by echoing the timeless wisdom of an African proverb: *"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together"*.

These words encapsulate the essence of our journey ahead, and my theme for the coming year is 'A Call for Diverse and Collaborative Leadership - Stronger Together to Secure a Sustainable Future for Us All!'

In the spirit of unity, let us work together to secure a sustainable future.

As we embark on this collective journey, it is essential to reflect on the challenges and opportunities that lie before us. CESA has a rich legacy of addressing critical issues in the built environment, and it is our responsibility to build upon this foundation and lead with vision and purpose.

As a proud member of the International Federation of Consulting Engineers, we recognise our role and relationship with the global engineering community, and we bear the responsibility of fostering collaboration and knowledge exchange within the African engineering community. Together, we can amplify our impact and contribute to the sustainable development of the entire continent.

However, we must collaborate in addressing the brain and talent drain leaving South Africa to lucrative international destinations.

Factors such as limited career advancement opportunities, disparities in compensation, and a perceived lack of recognition for expertise must be addressed.

Initiatives need to be undertaken to create an environment that not only retains local talent but also attracts global professionals. Strengthening ties with international engineering organisations, like FIDIC, can provide a platform for collaboration, knowledge exchange, and networking, making South Africa an appealing destination for professionals seeking a dynamic and rewarding career in the built environment.

In a world that increasingly demands growth, tolerance, and stability, we must position ourselves as standard-bearers of these values. As leaders in the engineering and built environments, we must actively promote and contribute to an environment that fosters collaboration, understanding and peaceful coexistence.

By doing so, we not only secure a stable foundation for our projects but also play a vital role in global progress and sustainable development.

As professionals in the built environment, we play a pivotal role in shaping the physical and social landscapes of local and global communities.

Collaborative efforts with international partners and organisations can facilitate the exchange of best practice, fostering a climate of peace and stability, and conducive to the successful implementation of projects on a local and global scale.

Moreover, enhancing digital and automation transformation is paramount for our local industry to remain at the forefront of the global technological landscape.

The world is undergoing a profound transformation and to remain at the forefront of technology globally, our local industry must embrace innovation. The integration of digital technologies and automation is not just a choice; it is an imperative for survival and success.

It is also not merely about adopting new technologies; it's about fundamentally reshaping the way we design, build, and maintain infrastructure.

Embracing Building Information Modelling, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence can enhance project efficiency, reduce costs, and improve sustainability. It is essential to invest in education and training programmes that equip our workforce with the skills needed for the digital era.

Furthermore, fostering a culture of innovation within our organisations will empower engineers to think creatively and push the boundaries of what is possible, ensuring that the South African industry remains a global leader in technology.

Let us commit ourselves to fostering an environment that encourages and supports innovation. By doing so, we can position our industry as a leader in adopting cutting-edge technologies - ensuring efficiency, sustainability, and competitiveness in the global market.

ECONOMIC GROWTH THROUGH SUSTAINABLE INFRASTRUCTURE

In anticipation of the proclamations that will be made by our country's President in the upcoming State of the Nation address, it is crucial to emphasise the importance of translating policy into action. A call to implement initiatives and leverage the skills present in the private sector is essential – “we're still looking for that seat at the table.”

Collaboration between government entities and the private sector is key to achieving success. Encouraging such partnerships can lead to:

- Faster project delivery,
- Improved resource allocation, and
- Enhanced overall project outcomes.

We are, of course, not ignorant to the many investment inhibitors, which we face as a country, so we too call on our government to get serious about earnestly addressing these, with a greater sense of urgency. This is an election year, and likely a watershed year, and we need to seize the opportunity, to build back better, in all aspects that impact on society.

Acknowledging and addressing the infrastructure backlog in South Africa is fundamental to meeting the needs of a growing population, not ignoring the realities we have been experiencing in the face of changing climatic patterns. Addressing the backlog in the country presents:

- An opportunity for job creation,
- Economic stimulation and
- Improved quality of life.

We call on government to focus on prioritising and fast-tracking key projects, coupled with efficient project management and resource allocation, to alleviate this backlog.

Consulting Engineers South Africa is committed to infrastructure development. We will continue to volunteer our efforts, uniting individual endeavours to create an enabling environment for:

- Successful planning,
- Implementation, and
- Completion of all infrastructure projects.

Failure is not an option for our communities. Today, Consulting Engineers South Africa reaffirms our call to work together – to collaborate within our communities and our nation, for the greater cause to ensure sustainable development.

It is an appeal to implement policies and utilise the skills in the private sector, emphasising that collaboration is key to success. Economic growth through sustainable infrastructure solutions is not just a goal; it is our duty to sustain the engineering and construction industry.

The importance of a robust procurement regulatory framework **CAN-NOT** be overstated. It ensures quality outcomes and safeguards against inefficiencies. Transformation, including broad-based black economic empowerment and employment equity, is not merely a legal requirement but a moral imperative, and we must implement these correctly.

These frameworks should prioritise transparency, fair competition, and adherence to industry standards. Rigorous evaluation processes must be in place to assess not only cost but also the long-term impact, sustainability, and innovation potential of proposed projects.

By promoting a fair and accountable procurement process, we can safeguard against corruption, ensure value for money, and raise the overall quality of infrastructure outcomes.

Importantly though too, we should go about implementing such measures, fairly, informedly and honestly. Dismissing the broader benefits contained in BBBEE legislation is short sighted, and likewise, the approach to driving compliance to Employment Equity legislation should always be done from an informed position.

We do though seem to be in an era of arguably ill conceived, populist legislation. The Public Procurement Bill and National Health Insurance, for example, are two groundbreaking pieces of legislation that not only impact our industry directly, but all of society.

Most commentators welcome these for all of the good reasons, but at the same time we lament the exclusion of the informed and constructive inputs made by many, and trust that the President will take sound advice before signing these into law.

LEAVE NO ONE BEHIND

CESA's commitment to 'leaving no one behind' is reflected in our efforts to protect lives and livelihoods. By creating a conducive environment for life and work options, we contribute to job creation and sustainable livelihoods.

A common purpose unites us to utilise our engineering skills and collaborate with other sectors. This enables us to address infrastructure backlogs and improve living conditions for all. Prioritising an inclusive approach to infrastructure development is essential. Infrastructure projects should not only focus on physical development but also on creating jobs, especially in marginalised communities.

By fostering economic inclusivity, we contribute not only to the development of individuals but also to the overall resilience and sustainability of our society. Linking economic growth with sustainable infrastructure solutions is vital for the long-term prosperity of the engineering and construction industries.

Sustainable practices, including green building technologies, energy-efficient designs, and eco-friendly construction materials, should be prioritised. Not only do these practices contribute to environmental conservation, but they also attract investments and align with global sustainability goals.

By achieving sustainability, we not only secure the future of our industries but also contribute to a healthier and more resilient economy.

EMPOWERING EXCELLENCE TOGETHER

The heart of Consulting Engineers South Africa lies in our members and industry partners. Our collective skills, capacity, experience, and innovative ideas, position us as drivers of positive change. We share a developmental vision, recognising the vital role we play in achieving a unified agenda for continuous professional development within the infrastructure environment.

Members of Consulting Engineers South Africa are bound by a code of ethics ensuring professionalism at all times. Many of our member companies hold ISO accreditation, a testament to their dedication to providing high-quality service to clients and society at large.

Our member companies and industry partners' collective knowledge spans various engineering disciplines, ensuring a comprehensive approach to problem-solving. The wealth of experience within our community positions us to navigate complex projects successfully, while the innovative thinking prevalent in our industry allows us to pioneer creative solutions to both existing and emerging challenges.

So I call on you

Let us leave no one behind!

We can do this! At CESA, we recognise the pivotal role played by our members, industry partners, government departments, and private sector client bodies in achieving a unified developmental agenda. Together, we form a crucial alliance working towards common goals. This collaborative approach not only maximises our collective impact but also fosters a culture of shared responsibility and achievement.

CESA proudly reaffirms our unwavering commitment to infrastructure development. We recognise the transformative power of well-planned and executed infrastructure projects in uplifting communities and driving economic progress.

As an organisation, we will continue to volunteer our efforts, mobilising collective expertise and resources. Our goal is to unite individual efforts, fostering collaboration between government bodies and private sector to ensure the successful planning, implementation, and completion of all infrastructure projects, thereby contributing to the sustainable development of our nation.

In our pursuit of infrastructure development, we firmly believe that failure is not an option. We recognise the profound influence infrastructure has on the lives of citizens, shaping their opportunities and quality of life. This realisation pushes us forward with a sense of urgency and determination.

It instils in us a commitment to excellence and a responsibility to deliver projects that stand the test of time, and positively impact generations to come.

Together We Can Go Far, Even Further Than Our Most Ambitious Dreams!

In conclusion, let our actions be guided by the principles of collaboration, commitment, and service. Together, we have the capacity to shape a future that surpasses even our most ambitious aspirations. As we embark on this journey, let us remember that our collective efforts today lay the foundation for a better tomorrow.

In the year ahead, we call on industry and all of its partners to forge a diverse and collaborative leadership. Let us become STRONGER TOGETHER to secure a sustainable future for all!

THANK YOU!