

CHAIRPERSON'S SPEECH AT THE LAUNCH OF THE CONSTRUCTION ALLIANCE

21 January 2021

INTRODUCTION

Honoured Guests. I have already welcomed all, so let me get right into it.

I am humbled and greatly honoured to be addressing you today and formally announce the formation of Construction Alliance South Africa – CASA on this, the 21st day of January 2021.

I think we can all vouch for the fact that the onslaught of COVID-19 has most definitely been an extremely Catastrophic period since March 2020.

How we react to this pandemic will define us and the following are ways as to how successful people push through Adversity.

1. Be mentally prepared.
2. Take stock of all you've been through already.
3. **Adversity** offers valuable insights.
4. Make peace with the situation.
5. Embrace this **adversity** as a chance for opportunity.
6. Refuse to give up.
7. Have a purpose.

Today we collectively seek to push through adversity with the launch of Casa. Allow me to delve into the background a bit.



BACKGROUND

CASA is a product of the collective effort of the entire construction industry in South Africa. Its formation is a historic moment with far-reaching effects that will transform, grow and improve the industry. Its formation is also notable because it comes at a crucial time when the construction industry is leading the country's economic recovery efforts, through the rollout of Strategic Integrated Infrastructure Projects to revive the economy.

The Alliance has brought together 29 of the sectors' professional, contractor, statutory, supplier and other bodies to become a united force that responds to industry issues. It has been formally constituted and is governed by a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) endorsed and signed by all the members. This MoU was drafted in a spirit of genuine and co-operative engagement, and is a demonstration of what can be achieved when open and transparent dialogue, an unwavering determination and a common purpose are at the core of our efforts to confront the challenges, we have as a sector.

For this I want to extend my sincere gratitude to the newly elected Deputy Chairperson of CASA, Mr Greg Mofokeng, for his support and determination in bringing this vision to fruition. I also want to extend my gratitude to all CASA members who have selflessly applied themselves to the task of uniting the sector and bringing this Alliance to life. I also have to recognise the efforts and contribution of Master Builders KwaZulu-Natal for convening this initiative since its inception, which I can assure you is not an easy task. Sincere thanks and appreciation is extended to Master Builders KZN Executive Council for sponsoring the Launch and providing the relevant support and resources to date.

So what is the Objective of CASA?

As I have mentioned before, *the need for unity in the sector cannot be over-emphasized*. We are not only confronted with the enormous challenge of re-building the construction industry out of the rubble of COVID-19, but also to make it more inclusive, transformed, innovative and competitive. As we do so, it is important to remember that in the pre-COVID era, our sector was already in a dire state characterised by very few work opportunities, increasing foreign competition, extortion and violence, company closures, loss of employment and continued calls to speed up the pace of transformation. The burden of COVID-19 has laid bare the need for urgency to create work opportunities, entrench fair competition and ethical business practices, eradicate the culture of fear created by mafia-styled criminal groups, adopt innovative building technologies for productivity improvements and enable sustainable, meaningful economic participation of our people. These are issues that are beyond any individual or organisation.

There is no doubt that without the private and public sector being able to join hands, we may end up working against each other.

In the face of these challenges, we have welcomed the gazetting of Strategic Integrated Projects (SIPs) by Minister de Lille as an important initial step towards recovery of the sector and the economy. Our call to the Minister is for immediate implementation of these projects i.e.

- *projects must procedurally go to tender*
- *projects must be fairly awarded*
- *payments must be made timeously*

This requires a collaborative effort and ongoing engagement between the Alliance and Minister de Lille in order to eliminate human and systematic bottlenecks in tendering and payment processes.

We also welcome the concerted effort by the Police Commissioner to stop the scourge of criminal gangs that are attacking contractors on sites under the pretext of economic transformation. The establishment of the Priority Committee on Extortion and Violence will help the sector to decisively deal with this problem. In respect of this I want to commend the BBCBE, CESA, MBSA, SAFCEC and SAICE for representing our sector on this Committee and in engagements with the SAPS on the matter.

However, the biggest responsibility in re-building the industry rests with us.

We are responsible for the health, safety and well-being of our workers and communities. COVID-19 is the single biggest health and economic threat for our industry at the moment, and health experts have singled out mass vaccinations as the only way out of this pandemic¹. A collaborative effort is needed to procure, fund and administer COVID-19 vaccines. We are therefore, in ongoing engagements with relevant authorities on how the industry can play a role and call upon Alliance members to support this initiative.

We are equally responsible for making the industry more competitive. Prevention of corruption and promotion of ethical business practices amongst our membership must be understood as an essential underlay of a sustainable and competitive industry. Similarly, productivity improvements and innovations will enable the sector to repel foreign competition and to be competitive enough to secure work opportunities even beyond the country's borders.

¹ <https://www.who.int/bulletin/volumes/86/2/07-040089/en/>

These are immediate tasks that the Alliance is facing.

However, when I look back at recorded successes of the Construction COVID-19 Rapid Response Task Team (CC19RRTT), I have no doubt that CASA is the correct vehicle to co-ordinate our effort to take on these responsibilities.

The formation of CASA magnifies the scale of efforts we have been making as individuals and organisations to build a transformed and competitive sector, entrenched in professionalism, fair competition and ethical business practices. It also unifies and amplifies the voice of the industry and broadens the channel of communication with government, particularly at this time when construction is taking the lead in the economic recovery of South Africa.

The saying that "In unity there is strength." Probably sums up the reason for what we are trying to achieve.

The common vision for the industry should be our commitment to transparency. Genuine and co-operative engagement shall be the beacon of our efforts and may this continue to direct responsibilities of existing CASA members and those to come.

I hereby formally pronounce the formation of Construction Alliance South Africa (CASA) on this, the 21st day of January 2021.

I thank you.

ENDS

John Matthews

Chairperson and Spokesperson