



MINISTRY  
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

Private Bag X645, PRETORIA, 0001 Tel (012) 421 1309 Fax (012) 341 8513 Private Bag X 9029, CAPE TOWN, 8000 Tel (021) 466 7603 Fax (021) 466 3610

## **ADDRESS**

**BY**

**THEMBI SIMELANE**

**MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, MP**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE OPENING OF THE INTERNATIONAL  
PAN-AFRICAN CITY SYMPOSIUM AND EXPOSITION AND THE LAUNCH  
OF THE INSTITUTE OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS PRACTITIONERS SOUTH  
AFRICA**

**22 JUNE 2026**

**NELSON MANDELA UNIVERSITY, SOUTH CAMPUS, SUMMERSTRAND,  
GQEBERHA**

Programme Director,

Human Settlements Director General, Dr Alec Moemi

Vice-Chancellor, Professor Sibongile Muthwa

Representatives of Universities,

Chief Executives and representatives of Human Settlements entities,  
Practitioners South Africa,

Representatives of the Pan-African City Symposium and Exposition,

Leaders of professional bodies and councils,

Representatives of provinces, metropolitan municipalities, and local government,

Distinguished guests,

Practitioners, graduates, students, innovators, and partners in the

Human Settlements sector,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good morning,

It is a great privilege to join you in this twin occasion of both the official launch of the Institute of Human Settlements Practitioners South Africa and opening of the International Pan-African City Symposium and Exposition held under the theme: **“Smart Futures Villages to Smart Economies – Exploring Models that Create Resilient, Equitable, Regenerative, and Thriving Communities.”**

The future is not built-in brick and mortar; the future is built through ideas.

It was Thomas Henry Huxley who reminded us that:

*“The known is finite, the unknown infinite; intellectually we stand on an islet in the midst of an illimitable ocean of inexplicability. our business in every generation is to reclaim a little more land, to add something to the extent and the solidity of our possessions.”*

The constant search for knowledge is an investment in the smart future that pillars the theme of our meeting today.

A conversation about smart futures cannot be separated from the people who must design, plan, implement and manage those futures. Smart cities, smart towns, smart villages, and smart settlements require smart institutions, smart partnerships, capable professionals and ethical practitioners.

They require a state and a sector that are able to think ahead, plan with care, implement with discipline, and place people at the centre of development.

This gathering is therefore more than a conference. It is a call to build a new generation of Human Settlements capability for South Africa and for the African continent. This conference is an incubator that cocoons the smart future we all yearn for.

Before I go any further, acknowledge and thank the leadership of the Institute, particularly Professor Mbanga, for the commendable work done over many years in advancing the transformation of the Human Settlements space.

The launch of this Institute is not an accidental event. It is the result of years of ideas, advocacy, academic work, sector mobilisation and commitment to the recognition of Human Settlements as a serious field of knowledge, practice, and public service.

Equally, special acknowledgement goes to the Chairperson of the US-Africa Collaborative, Ms Elizabeth Scott Glenn, who has joined us all the way from the United States of America. We trust that you will enjoy the unique South African hospitality, especially its beautiful flora and fauna.

Today, we honour the work done today. But more importantly, we are taking it forward.

Programme Director,

The theme of the Symposium, Smart Futures, speaks directly to the challenges of our time. Across the African continent, cities are growing rapidly. Informal settlements continue to expand. Climate-related disasters are becoming more frequent and more destructive. Migration, unemployment, inequality, social fragmentation, and pressure on basic services are placing enormous demands on governments and communities.

In this context, a smart future is not merely about technology. It is not only about digital platforms, sensors, artificial intelligence, or modern infrastructure. Those things matter, but they are not enough.

A truly smart human settlement is one that is inclusive, resilient, well-located, serviced, safe, affordable, climate-responsive and socially just. It is a settlement where women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities, young people, migrants, and vulnerable households are not left behind. It is a settlement where innovation serves human dignity.

This is the future we must build.

Our cities should be people centred, development driven and powered by innovations – nothing less would do.

As the Department of Human Settlements, we are increasingly clear that our work can no longer be limited to the delivery of housing units alone. We must build sustainable and integrated human settlements. This requires land, planning, infrastructure, services, social amenities, economic opportunity, climate resilience, tenure security, community participation and long-term settlement management.

It is for this reason that we consider the launch of the Institute, as an important milestone for the human settlements sector. Our sector demands for practitioners who understand the whole infrastructure delivery value chain. Importantly, for us to realise our mandate and objectives, it is imperative that we become intentional about building our capacity.

This demands that we have professionals that can correctly interpret legislative and policy frameworks in relation to various aspects such as planning, land acquisition and management, infrastructure development, financing mechanisms.

Moreover, the need for capability to effectively manage project construction, beneficiary management, social facilitation, informal settlement upgrading, rental housing, affordable housing, title deeds, climate resilience, cannot be overemphasised.

These are to be strengthened through stakeholder involvement and to ensure that monitoring and evaluation is strengthened.

Therefore, the human settlements sector requires competent capacity, that displays consistent professionalism and ethical conduct.

Programme Director,

Earlier this year, the Human Settlements sector convened the national summit on Innovative Building Technologies. The summit was about crucial alternative to conventional construction methods in the delivery of sustainable integrated human settlements. I am also very much encouraged on the academic research outputs that we continue to realise as part of the innovative technologies.

Worth noting is that the outcomes of the IBT Summit confirmed several important matters.

Firstly, is that innovation ought to shift from the margins of the sector into the mainstream of delivery. This means that the IBTs should no longer be treated as mere pilot projects, exhibitions, or experimental alternatives. Instead, they should form the integral part of practical toolkits available across government, provinces, municipalities, developers, communities and implementing agents.

Secondly, the sector agreed that there must be stronger alignment among regulators, certifying bodies, government, industry, financiers, insurers, professionals, universities, and communities. Innovation fails when the ecosystem is fragmented. It succeeds when the system is coordinated.

Thirdly, the summit confirmed that IBTs should serve as an enable to improving speed while ensuring quality, durability, climate responsiveness and value for money. It must assist us to respond to blocked projects, emergency housing needs, informal settlement upgrading, social housing, student accommodation, military veterans housing and other priority areas.

Lastly, the outcomes placed emphasis on procurement reforms, standardisation, technical assurance, quality control, beneficiary acceptance and the creation of a credible pipeline of projects where IBT can be implemented at scale. The sector has already taken off the ground to adopt innovative technologies in our response strategies. As a start, Provinces are allowed to use a minimum of 2% of the Human Settlements Development Grant.

The IBT agenda is therefore directly linked to the professionalisation agenda. New technologies require alignment with requisite skills. In this quest, we require practitioners who fully comprehend standards,

compliance, social acceptance, project management, municipal approval processes, construction quality, maintenance and lifecycle performance.

It therefore goes without saying that we cannot build smart futures with outdated capabilities. We cannot industrialise housing and human settlements delivery without professionalising the people who must lead, manage, coordinate, and implement that change.

Programme Director,

The human settlements sector is also at the forefront of the devastating impact of climate change, and it demands proactive, rather than reactive strategies.

The persistent manifestation of disasters through floods, storms, fires, extreme weather events, droughts, heatwaves and other climate-related shocks affecting communities across the country is a cause of concern. More so because these directly affect the vulnerable groups of our society, including those in the susceptible locations, informal settlements, flood-prone areas, unstable land, or in settlements where basic infrastructure is not available.

Our priority is therefore to shift from a reactive posture to a proactive resilience model of human settlements delivery.

Therefore climate risk must be built into our planning, land identification, infrastructure design, informal settlement upgrading emergency housing response and community education programmes. Additionally, a collaborative approach between the spheres of government, professional bodies, community leaders and traditional leaders is no longer an option if we want to intensify our interventions for sustainable and resilient communities.

A future we all should aspire is the one where we no longer focus on the delivery numbers, but the extent to which our settlements are safe, have access to economic opportunities, climate resilient and importantly, that they meaningfully contribute to protecting the dignity of vulnerable citizens through access to basic amenities. We can only realise these aspirations by anchoring our strategies around professionalisation of the skills in the sector. Professionals are an important pillar for driving

undoing of the historical inequalities by designing integrated mixed-income areas, and sustainable upgrading of informal settlements.

These should be accompanied by the continuous professional development, which is one of the focal areas of the Institute.

Programme Director,

Today's gathering takes place at a time when the country is facing difficult social tensions associated with anti-illegal immigration demonstrations and heightened community anxiety in some neighbourhoods.

As government, we must be clear and principled.

South Africa is a constitutional democracy, therefore, the rule of law must prevail. Communities have the right to raise concerns, however no person should be subjected to violence, intimidation, or displacement. Women, children, older persons, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable people must never become victims of fear, anger, or social instability in our neighbourhoods.

It is important that we reflect on these matters as any instability has a direct impact on the settlements, and our mandate as a sector.

Nonetheless, our response must be guided by the Constitution, the law, human dignity, public safety, and social stability.

We must reject violence. We must reject vigilantism. We must reject the targeting of vulnerable people.

Meanwhile, government continues to proactively manage migration, documentation and access to services in a lawful, coordinated and credible manner.

Human settlements extend far beyond mere physical infrastructure. They represent social and economic spaces. Thus, failure to manage settlement tensions, social cohesion and community trust, will demonstrate failure to establish viable and resilient communities.

Programme Director,

The launch of the IHSP-SA is timely, as it takes place during a highly consequential phase of national policy development. In 2024, Cabinet

approved the White Paper for Human Settlements. The White Paper provides the policy foundation for the delivery of sustainable and integrated human settlements in South Africa.

Among key policy proposals is the recognition that the sector requires stronger capacity, better institutional arrangements, minimum competencies, continuous development, and the professionalisation of Human Settlements practice.

Additionally, the White Paper advances that human settlements must not be viewed through a narrow technical lens, but rather as an integrated ecosystem requiring collective action across academic disciplines, government spheres, professional organizations, and civic communities. For this reason, the professionalisation of human settlements constitutes an absolute imperative, rather than a superfluous luxury.

Therefore, the formalisation of the partnership between the Department and the Institute is a firm commitment to this cause. Elevating professional standards should provide clear solutions to several critical questions relating to: Clear definition of a Human Settlements practitioner.

The core competences to be possessed by practitioners;

Ethical and professional standards;

Practitioner's role in the human settlements' delivery value chain across the three spheres of government.

These are not mere academic questions; they are delivery questions. They are accountability questions. They are questions of ensuring that public trust is restored.

Programme Director,

For this reason, the Department of Human Settlements is formalising a Cooperation Agreement with the Institute, for the purpose of promoting the professionalisation agenda in the sector.

The primary objective of this Cooperation Agreement is to support interventions around capacity development, professional standards,

research, continuing professional development, ethical practice, graduate support, practitioner recognition and the strengthening of

Human Settlements as a field of practice. All these will be undertaken in line with all regulatory prescripts and processes guiding public service.

We will also collaborate with other built environment statutory bodies such as the Council for the Built Environment and its various Councils, with the aim of eliminating duplication. Our focus is on ensuring meaningful contribution towards achieving the mandate of the Department, and realisation of government priorities.

I can confidently indicate that preliminary consultations have already commenced between the Department and the Council for the Built Environment (CBE) to secure strategic guidance on navigating the professionalisation process. This engagement is crucial, as the human settlements sector naturally intersects with multiple established built environment disciplines, yet simultaneously encompasses unique operational areas that fall outside the jurisdiction of current statutory councils.

Recently, the human settlements sector has experienced a decline in project completion rate. Industry experts widely attribute this decline to disjointed investment towards social facilitation, resulting to intensified disruptions by construction mafias. Strategic social facilitation remains indispensable; it allows authorities to partner with local communities through both digital channels and face-to-face interactions to co-create infrastructure, promote shared stewardship, and reduce local resistance.

Therefore, the strategic partnerships with professional bodies in the built environment should promote alignment of transdisciplinary skills and delivery value chain.

Programme Director,

Today I wish to announce two national special projects that will support this professionalisation agenda.

The first is a National Special Project on the coordinating Capacity of Municipalities and Provinces to Plan, Develop and Manage Human

Settlement Programmes working together with the Presidency in driving housing and human settlements reforms.

This coordination will focus on putting systems in place for government to respond to the diverse housing and human settlements needs of communities. Particular attention will be given to accredited municipalities and secondary cities in provinces.

It is therefore essential to map out existing institutional capacity, diagnose operational weaknesses, and determine where critical support should be prioritized. Recognition is that Municipalities serve as the primary interface for human settlements development, managing the complexities of land-use planning, infrastructure delivery, regulatory approvals, community engagement, and localized economic growth.

When institutional capacity at the local sphere is compromised, systemic failures cascade through the entire human settlements value chain. This special project will therefore assist the Department to make evidence-based decisions on capacity support, accreditation, assignment, programme management and institutional strengthening.

The second project will focus on the Development of a National Strategy for the Engagement of Housing and Human Settlements Graduates.

Over the years, universities have produced graduates in housing and human settlements programmes. These graduates possess skills, knowledge and attributes that are directly relevant to the sector. Yet many of them do not find structured pathways into the Human Settlements system.

This systemic disconnect must be addressed and corrected. At the centre of this strategy is prioritising structured experiential learning, formalized internship models, and youth entrepreneurship initiatives to enrich the human settlements sector. Concurrently, the strategy should provide insights into how to effectively integrate these emerging professionals into specialised areas of human settlements practice.

Among these key areas is social facilitation, data infrastructure, and local government support. Additional focus areas include beneficiary management, affordable housing development, title deed acceleration, and the adoption of modern, sustainable construction techniques.

It is incumbent upon us to bridge the gap between tertiary education and the suitable workforce. Otherwise, it is counterproductive to train graduates and then lock them out of the sector that needs their skills the most.

Programme Director,

In support of this agenda, we continue to urge all provinces, metropolitan municipalities, Human Settlements entities and non-governmental organisations to prioritise specialised human settlement development qualifications when advertising jobs for the sector.

Contractors, developers, and service providers in human settlements technical projects need to do the same by creating opportunities for these graduates

This does not mean that other relevant qualifications are excluded. It means that Human Settlements qualifications must no longer be invisible in the sector they were designed to serve.

Where a post requires knowledge of Human Settlements policy, housing programmes, beneficiary administration, informal settlement upgrading, social facilitation, settlement planning, programme coordination or related areas, the relevant housing and Human Settlements qualifications must be recognised.

This is a matter of fairness. It is also a matter of sector capability.

We cannot speak about professionalisation while failing to recognise the qualifications already developed for the sector.

Programme Director,

I also wish to make a call to universities, in consultation with the Department of Higher Education and Training, to explore mechanisms for managing students' historic study debts in a manner that enables withheld degree certificates to be released to housing and Human Settlements graduates.

We understand that universities operate within financial constraints. We do not underestimate those realities. However, we must also recognise that when a graduate has completed the academic requirements but

cannot access their certificate because of historic debt, their transition into employment and professional life is delayed or blocked.

This affects the graduate. It affects the family. It affects the sector. It affects the country.

We therefore call for practical, lawful and compassionate mechanisms that can enable qualifying graduates to move into the home building industry, the Human Settlements sector, municipalities, entities, NGOs and entrepreneurial opportunities.

Programme Director,

The launch of the Institute must therefore not be viewed merely as the creation of another organisation.

It must be viewed as the beginning of a disciplined national effort to build the Human Settlements profession.

The Institute must become a home for practitioners. It must promote ethics. It must support continuous professional development. It must work with universities. It must support graduates. It must assist government to build capacity. It must contribute to research and innovation. It must promote accountability. It must help us build a sector that is worthy of the people we serve.

But the Institute must also hold itself to the highest standards of governance, credibility, inclusivity and professionalism. Its legitimacy will depend not only on its launch, but on the value, it adds to practitioners, communities and the state.

As government, we look forward to working with the Institute, universities, professional bodies, provinces, municipalities, entities, NGOs, the private sector and international partners in taking this work forward.

Programme Director,

The Human Settlements sector stands at a turning point.

We are confronted by backlogs, climate risks, social tensions, urbanisation, informal settlements, ageing infrastructure, constrained public finances and rising community expectations. But we are also presented with opportunities: new technologies, young graduates,

research institutions, universities, professional bodies, innovative building systems, digital tools, and committed practitioners.

The question is whether we will bring these elements together into a coherent national effort.

Smart futures will not build themselves.

They will be built by capable institutions, ethical practitioners, skilled graduates, innovative professionals, responsive municipalities, committed provinces, accountable entities and active communities.

Today, as we open this International Pan-African City Symposium and Exposition, and as we launch the Institute of Human Settlements Practitioners South Africa, let us commit ourselves to building that future.

Let us build a sector that is professional.

Let us build a sector that is ethical.

Let us build a sector that is climate resilient.

Let us build a sector that protects the vulnerable.

Let us build a sector that recognises young graduates.

Let us build a sector that works across disciplines and institutions.

Above all, let us build human settlements that restore dignity, advance justice and give practical meaning to the promise of a better life for all.

I congratulate the Institute on its launch.

I wish the International Pan-African City Symposium and Exposition successful deliberations.

May this gathering mark not only the launch of an Institute, but the beginning of a stronger, smarter and more professional Human Settlements sector.

I thank you.