

## **ADDRESS BY EXECUTIVE DEPUTY PRESIDENT THABO MBEKI, TO THE PRODUCTIVITY AND QUALITY IMPROVEMENT CONFERENCE**

13TH MARCH, 1997

Chairperson,  
Honourable Guests,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me express our gratitude to the organisers for inviting us to this conference on productivity and quality improvement in the public sector. A very warm welcome to you all. For those who come from outside the borders of our country, I would like to extend our hospitality and an enjoyable rewarding and fruitful stay in South Africa.

Glancing through the list of delegates and participants, I could not but notice that these include well informed and knowledgeable public sector senior managers, directors of private and parastatals corporations, representatives of labour organisations and members of the diplomatic corps. This augurs well for the conference and underscores the seriousness with which you view efforts to improve productivity in the public sector.

The coming into power of the democratic government in 1994 heralded a new era for the public sector. A democratic system of government can only mean that the public sector acts primarily as agent for the implementation of transformative and developmental programmes which are the hall-mark of this government. No longer can the public sector act as a bastion of reaction against the people's desire for a better future.

The new reality demands that we undertake a thorough-going transformation process within the public sector to change it into one that responds to people's needs and is customer focused. We are far from completing this transformation process.

This conference is, therefore, not only a historical event in our country, but it is also taking place at a time when government has declared 1997 a year that will see the acceleration of the implementation of policies and programmes, especially those that focus on poverty relief, encourage investment and create sustainable jobs for our people.

Yesterday the Minister of Finance presented a budget that focuses on all these areas. We have committed ourselves to the provision of quality education, increased social services expenditure, to continue to address such issues as the reduction of poverty and homelessness and the elimination of social, economic and political inequalities.

We have come to appreciate that to achieve these laudable goals, we need to commit ourselves to the improvement of the capacity of the public sector to deliver. It is therefore essential that we develop policies and strategies to promote productivity. It is from this that your conference derives its importance.

In a society such as ours where we are undergoing a process of reform and transformation, productivity improvement must first and foremost mean the productive and efficient use of scarce resources by both the public and the private sectors. It must also mean a fundamental change of attitude.

Among other things apartheid South Africa was about repression, graft and corruption and the control of people. A democratic SA has to be about delivery of services, respect of people and their cultures, upholding human rights and all the other noble ideas contained in our new Constitution. This new reality demands a different attitude and behaviour from public officials.

A fundamental change in attitude and behaviour by public servants is imperative if we are to succeed in transforming our country and make it increasingly competitive and efficient in the delivery of services to the citizenry.

It is with this in mind that we have gathered here today from different walks of socio-economic and political life to consider and fashion out policies and strategies for improving public sector productivity and the quality of services we provide to our people. But improving productivity and quality requires an enabling environment and incentives to encourage and foster initiative, drive, commitment and excellence.

My colleague, the Minister of Public Service and Administration, Dr Zola Skweyiya, will, in his address to this conference, focus more specifically how government has committed itself to providing an enabling environment for productivity and quality improvement.

Suffice it to say however, that productivity and quality improvement also requires the enhancement of the capacities and capabilities of people and institutions alike, from the village to the highest echelons of government.

It is my sincere hope that your deliberations over the next two days will touch on issues such as:

- the policy framework for the promotion of productivity and quality in the public sector;
- the role that government should and must play in this regard; and
- the place and role of labour, labour organisations and public sector management.

Over the last two years it has become evident that some of the constraints we face in government s we seek to implement new programmes is weak institutional arrangements, poor and inadequate management capacity and declining public sector productivity. The skills required to implement government policies are in short supply and sometimes inappropriately deployed. It is clear that the public service needs a bold and imaginative strategy to tackle these problems and place it on a sound, efficient and effective footing.

But of equal significance, productivity and quality improvement will also require a political leadership that not only understands and appreciate the significance of productivity and quality improvements, but is totally committed to it and is uncompromising. Let me assure you of this government's commitment to this objective.

I hope that your deliberations over the next two days will not only inspire you but will leave all of us better equipped to meet the common challenges. Our people deserve a public service that is truly committed and uncompromising when it comes to service delivery and the quality thereof.

Finally let me take this opportunity to thank the Minister for Public Service and Administration and the South African Management Development Institute for organising this conference, confident that it will make an important contribution to meeting the historic challenge of the renewal of our country and society.

THANK YOU!