

SACPCMP

The South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions

— CONSTRUCTING NEW PERSPECTIVES —

SACPCMP Thought Leadership

Do We Need a Construction Mafia to Add to the Country's Woes?

Midrand Thursday, 04 April 2019 - Registrar of the South Africa Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP), Mr. Moroka Isaac Butcher Matutle, comments on the incidences of intimidation and alleged "construction mafia" activity that has currently gripped headlines in South Africa:

"Various bodies such as the Association of South African Quantity Surveyors (ASAQS), The Black Business Council for the Built Environment (BBCBE) and the South African Forum for Civil Engineering Contractors (SAFCEC) have raised concerns about the "invasion" of construction sites, where foremen, project managers and construction personnel are intimidated with, in some instances, automatic weapons.

The fact that these individuals are armed, cause rampant damage to property, and injure and kill workers, is reason enough to equate them to the mafia. These groups are bent on demanding a stake in the projects without consideration for project requirements. As the SACPCMP, the Department of Public Works, sister councils and the Council for the Built Environment are concerned with the safety of the public, such tactics cannot be condoned, and can only be classified as acts of criminality.

Greater dialogue should go a long way in addressing the problems that are plaguing the construction industry.

The impact on the economy is significant indeed. SAFCEC indicates in a letter addressed to Finance Minister, Mr. Tito Mboweni, that construction projects to the value of R25.5 billion have been put on hold, and the impact on the industry can be detrimental. Properties are burned to the ground and workers must literally flee. Work stoppages and project delays have a ripple effect on the industry and on the South African economy. The SAFCEC CEO, Mr. Webster Mfebe, saw it fit to escalate the matter to President Cyril Ramaphosa.

The work stoppage on the Mntentu Bridge project in the Eastern Cape can best be described as a travesty in the sense that, had it been completed, it would have been the highest bridge built in Africa. However, interference that felt a need to dictate who Aveng should have employed on this project caused this potential "crown jewel of Africa" to be

halted. To add insult to injury, according to Aveng management, a female engineer was manhandled. The site was inaccessible for 84 days and considered to be unsafe.

At a breakfast event in KwaZulu-Natal late in 2018, President Ramaphosa commented: “What these people are doing is not radical economic transformation, it is radical economic robbery – we can’t allow that.”

The devastating effect of such activity, in addition to eroding our economy, creates a negative image for investors and potential investors. Furthermore, skilled personnel such as engineers, have also opted to leave the country which exacerbates the already precarious situation we face.

All construction projects and sites should be considered professional and ethical spaces, and all activity and interventions that emanate from this environment should be underpinned by professional and ethical codes at all times.

This war-zone mentality cannot prevail; and no party benefits. Engaging in dialogue in a professional spirit will go a long way in remedying this situation. These individuals need to understand that each construction project has its own demands, and “hijacking” a 30% stake in all projects will not be in the best interests of both the project and the safety of the public.

Our youth are impressionable individuals. We, as responsible adults, may be communicating an erroneous message that we can hold projects to ransom and make demands using mafia-style stances. Our youth may get the false impression that it is the norm to “bulldoze” (no pun intended!) their way, with scant consideration for the law of the land. We should be communicating the more appropriate messages relating to career growth and development. Those individuals wreaking havoc on construction sites should heed this call and I am certain that they would not want their own children to adopt such a myopic vision.

I understand that the economy could do with some “defibrillation” and that unemployment needs to be addressed urgently. However, the President of the country is addressing these issues and we should all be encouraged to engage in dialogue rather than intimidation.”

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Note to Editors

The South African Council for the Project and Construction Management Professions (SACPCMP) is empowered by section 18 of Act No. 48 of 2000 to certify, register and regulate the Project and Construction Management Professions.

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