

INCUBATOR LAUNCH: SOWETO

20 June 2011

Speech by Dr Narissa Ramdhani, CEO – Ifa Lethu Foundation

The CEO of the Transnet Foundation, The Ward Councillor, Members of the Transnet Foundation, especially Ms. Susie Maabie, Officials of the City of Johannesburg, Members of the Board of Ifa Lethu, Honored Guests, our participants and their parents, our Artists-all protocol observed. I am Narissa Ramdhani, the CEO of the Ifa Lethu Foundation and may I say how pleased I am to coordinate this afternoon's proceedings. This is indeed a very special day for Ifa Lethu as it marks the opening of our First 'Creative Hands' Incubator in Soweto and only the second in the country. This initiative which assists our overarching attempts of satisfying our country's national impact priorities and the Millennium goals of poverty alleviation, youth and women's development and community upliftment really demonstrate our commitment to empowering South Africa's creative sectors.

In the last three years, Ifa Lethu has successfully trained 2300 practitioners in the areas of visual arts, craft, sculpture and fashion and has created employment for 800 young entrepreneurs from Gauteng, KZN, Limpopo and the Northwest provinces. We expect to accomplish the same deliverables in other provinces in this year. Many of the products created have been sold at the duty free stores at airports, to the corporate sectors, and at shopping malls in the country. Ifa Lethu currently manages South Africa's largest repatriation and creative entrepreneurial efforts. The Incubator that we open today will serve Ifa Lethu in empowering the youth and the general community of Soweto. So that they may become self sustaining. However without the support of Transnet and its Foundation, this project would not have been possible. Their agreement to buy into our vision for the youth of South Africa is extremely laudable and demonstrates their commitment to this segment of our society. The Department of Trade and Industry estimates that SA creative sector alone contributes about R2 billion or 0.14% to our country's GDP annually. In addition the sector provides jobs and income for approximately 38 000 people through an estimated 7000 small enterprises. So the effect on national employment is significant. Hence we can only hope that other government entities and corporates follow the example set by Transnet. I recall early conversations, about three years ago, with the then Head of the Transnet Foundation, Ms. Susie Maabie about our attempts to move into the area of creative entrepreneurship and about the support that we were seeking from Transnet for this innovative move. I would never forget her enthusiasm and her assurances to us in this regard. And with that discussion began this wonderful relationship with Transnet which saw not only this project being launched today, but the support for many other national projects which have set other creative entrepreneurs on the road to economic success. Ms. Maabie, Ifa Lethu is ever so grateful to you for your confidence in our projects and our ability to deliver on the many projects.

Launching the Incubator today is also fortuitous as we celebrate Youth Month as well as the lives of one of our greatest mentors and residents of Soweto-Mama Sisulu. Drawing on the lessons of her life and the legacy of our comrades from June 16 1976, youth of Soweto have the opportunity to exert the power necessary to transform South Africa into the democracy that we so treasure. Through Incubators such as the one we launch today, Ifa Lethu is providing creative practitioners with the means to transform themselves into entrepreneurs. We hope that this will also demonstrate to our Youth that there is really no need to accept limits to their dreams and visions, but that they should invest their boundless energies wisely. And with this in place, Transnet's investment in this project will yield phenomenal results.

Moving on to this morning's programme, we are pleased to have many two exciting speakers here, both of whom have extremely busy schedules, but have taken time to be here today, thus recognising the value of Ifa Lethu's work in Soweto and the strength resident within the young people of Soweto. Our first speaker is Mr. Brian Molefe, the CEO of Transnet, without whose generous support, the training and Incubator projects would not have materialised.

Reading through Mr. Molefe's CV has left me with such a sense of pride not least because of his achievements in the corporate world of SA, but moreso because of his role in the democracy that we so enjoy today. Mr. Molefe is one of South Africa's most prominent businessman and has been at the helm of our country's foremost industries. Before being appointed CEO of Transnet and Chairman of the Lion of Africa Fund Managers, also worked for two years in the office of the Premier in Limpopo where he was responsible for strategic planning. He also served as the CEO of one of South Africa's most powerful investment funds, the Public Investment Corporation and then as Executive Director of Telkom SA Ltd. But he cut his political teeth in student activism in 1985 when he enrolled at the then University of Natal and joined AZASO. So having this struggle veteran, student activist and successful businessman address us and more specifically our young participants today during Youth month in Soweto, is a valued and poignant opportunity indeed