

# #MakeConstructionGreatAgain – The Association of Schools of Construction Southern Africa’s 11<sup>th</sup> Built Environment Conference

*By Hendrik Prinsloo*

In a world where conference themes can sometimes be run of the mill and mundane, with the sole purpose to cast the net as wide as possible to attract papers from all corners of industry, it was refreshing to learn that the theme of the Association of Schools of Construction Southern Africa’s (ASOCSA) 11<sup>th</sup> Built Environment Conference were both forward looking and positive. One can not be faulted to think of a recent successful presidential campaign’s slogan when seeing the conference theme for first time. Like the outcome of this presidential campaign, the 11<sup>th</sup> Built Environment Conference was also a big success. The conference theme: *#MakeConstructionGreatAgain* formed the foundation of several thought-provoking presentations and discussions.

After taking place in Port Elizabeth last year, the conference returned to Durban, where the Department of Public Works made their conference facility available for this important industry event. The Conference commenced on 6 August 2017 with the Heads Forum where the leaders of construction departments of Southern Africa’s leading Universities deliberated on challenges faced within the academic landscape and how to collectively ensure that construction education remains relevant in a changing society. The Heads Forum was followed by the ASOCSA Annual General Meeting and Council Meeting where the focus shifted to the election of new office bearers.

One of the highlights of the opening day of the conference was the keynote address by the MEC: KZN Department of Human Settlement and Public Works: Mr Ravi Pillay. The key note set the scene for further presentations and deliberation on how through transformation the construction industry can become a catalyst for job creation and economic growth. During the afternoon, a large number of academic papers responding to conference sub-themes of: construction innovation, construction education and sustainable construction, were presented, providing ample opportunity for debate.

The opening day concluded with another important event – the Lifetime Award Gala Dinner, where exceptional industry achievement was celebrated. Mrs Pugh, MD of FEM received a lifetime achievement award for her remarkable work during the past 48 years promoting health and safety in the construction industry. Mr Aubrey Tshalata, President of the National African Federation for the Building Industry was honoured with a leadership award for his outstanding contribution to the objective of transformation in the construction industry. The proceedings concluded with the announcement of the newly elected leadership of the Association of Schools of Construction Southern Africa. Dr Hendrik Prinsloo was elected as the new president, Mr Victor Smith as the new vice president and Prof Kahilu Kajimo-Shakantu as the chairperson of the Heads Forum. Dr Breda Strasheim (honorary treasurer), Mrs Elke Heffer, Prof Kahilu Kajimo-Shakantu and Mr Ephriam Zulu (honorary secretary) were introduced as the new members of the council. In his remarks, the new president, thanked all the past presidents and office bearers who over a long period of time worked tirelessly to

make ASOCSA the successful organisation it is today. He also paid tribute to the unselfish contribution by the immediate past president, Mr Ferdinand Fester, who for a long period of time executed the duties as president with vigour and with unwavering commitment.

The final day of the conference provided further opportunity for discussion with the presentation of research papers on public sector contracting, infrastructure challenges and international construction. The conference would not have been possible without the hard work and dedication of the conference organisers.

The success of this Conference can not only be attributed to the 62 research papers presented (more than any of the previous conferences) and the large number of participants but more importantly the strides that were made to set in motion a common industry goal to #MakeConstructionGreatAgain.