

# Dirco's impressive HQ towers in city

## Stands as showcase for department's mission

STAFF REPORTER

UNDOUBTEDLY the most impressive government department headquarters in Pretoria is the OR Tambo Building on the northern side of Meintjieskop, home of the Department of International Relations and Co-operation, known by its acronym Dirco.

Designed to symbolise unification, it is one of the largest new state buildings constructed in South Africa since 1994, and is linked to the Union Buildings via Tom Jenkins Drive.

Costing R1,2billion and built as a public-private partnership, it was completed in just two years from the start of construction in May 2007.

The design by Mark Penneharz, of TC Design Architects, in joint venture with ACG Architects is described as "a large, multi-level structure in concrete and glass, with imposing, repeated "spines" and large staircases being the visible exterior elements" (able.wiki.up.ac.za)

The northern facade on Soutpansberg Road is composed of a series of neo-classical concrete columns, rectilinear wall-cladding panels, and suspended curving metal shapes.

Set back from the colonnades and shaded by suspended metal brise soleil is a curtain wall of coloured panels, featuring bright, rectilinear glass, the description continues.

The south facade features large, curving columns or flying buttresses – nicknamed by some locals as a "fish skeleton".

The total floor space of 138 570m<sup>2</sup> was planned to accommodate about 2500 employees with open areas and a conference facility designed to house the AU and SADC conferences. The building is surrounded by more than 15 hectares of landscaped gardens.

As home to Dirco, it is a showcase of the department's mission, described as being "to formulate, co-ordinate, implement and manage South Africa's foreign policy and international relations programmes, promote South Africa's national interest and values and the African Renaissance". (www.difa.gov.za/)

Through bilateral and multilateral interactions Dirco strives to protect and promote South African national interests and values; conduct and co-ordinate South Africa's international relations and promote its foreign policy objectives. It monitors international developments and advises the government on foreign policy and related domestic matters.

The task is vast with South Africa now supporting 104 embassies and high commissions, 99 consulates and honorary consulates, two liaison offices and 12 international organisations abroad. Dirco provides consular services to South African nationals abroad and manages the country's State Protocol service.

South Africa plays host to a growing number of foreign representatives at 123 embassies and high commissions, 53 consulates, 79 honorary consulates, one liaison office and 35 international organisations. Many of these representatives have their offices in Pretoria and work directly with Dirco.

The department falls under the Minister of International Relations and Co-operation, Maitse Nkoana-Mashabane, and the director-general is ambassador Jerry Matjila, a founding member of the department.

Says Nkoana-Mashabane: "Our country must



The canteen area at the Dirco building.

continue to support regional and continental processes to respond to and resolve crises, strengthen regional integration, significantly increase intra-African trade (and) champion sustainable development and opportunities in Africa.

"In this regard, South Africa will continue to play a leading role in conflict prevention, peace-keeping, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction."



Maitse Nkoana-Mashabane, Minister of International Relations and Co-operation.

Dirco supports the AU and UN initiatives to find just and lasting solutions to outstanding issues of self-determination and decolonisation on the African continent.

This includes working to strengthen the AU and the SADC, revitalising the New Partnership for Africa's Development (Nepad), and a framework for the South African Development Partnership Agency (Sadpa).

The department has a record of achievement in multilateral organisations such as the UN, the Bretton Woods Institutions, the Group of Twenty (G20), as well as in groupings of the South such as the Non-Aligned Movement; Group of 77 (G77); Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (Brics); India, Brazil, South Africa Dialogue Forum; and, the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Co-operation; formations of the North such as the Africa-Europe Strategic Partnership, Tokyo International Conference on African Development; India-Africa Forum; Korea-Africa Forum; and, the Africa-Turkey Forum.

South Africa participates in global human rights mechanisms using bilateral and high-level engagements to reinforce and expand co-operation in the political, economic, social and security spheres.

South Africa's foreign policy recognises that development and security are best addressed through paying attention to global threats and is supports disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.

Marketing and branding initiatives are aimed to portray South Africa as a stable democracy, a safe investment destination, a reliable trading partner and a wonderful tourist destination and works closely with Brand South Africa to protect and project the country's image locally and abroad.



The entrance to the Department of International Relations and Co-operation.

PICTURES: DIF

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