

## **Cape Town Convention Centre to get R800m Growth Boost**

Cape Town's highly successful international convention centre had been given the go-ahead to start an estimated R800m expansion by taking over the old Customs House in the city's port area, Western Cape premier Ebrahim Rasool said on Monday.

Rasool confirmed that Public Works Minister Thoko Didiza had said at the weekend's presidential imbizo in the province that her department had agreed to put Customs House "at the disposal" of the centre.

The convention centre last year hosted 46 international conventions and the joint partnership between the province and the city council had been a runaway success story, attracting thousands of business tourists in the meeting, incentives, conferences and exhibitions sector, seen as the key to boosting SA's tourism industry.

Rasool said at the opening of the Southern African Association for the Conference Industry's national conference in Cape Town on Monday that negotiations had been in progress for the past two months with Didiza on the future of Customs House.

The matter had been urgent because the centre had been "a huge success", and the need to expand it had been recognised.

However, he said, the possibility of Cape Town hosting the International Broadcasting Centre for the 2010 Soccer World Cup had made these negotiations "critical".

Didiza, who accompanied President Thabo Mbeki on the weekend's imbizo "confirmed with me that her department has agreed to put Customs House at the disposal of the centre".

"Simply put, we can commence with the expansion, whether for the broadcasting centre in 2010 or to meet the growth in the conference industry in Cape Town.

"This is not the time to speak to the further contents of the negotiations because none of them are onerous," said Rasool.

Rasool said that the decision was “good news indeed”, and would add to the many “enduring legacies” brought about by World Cup 2010 and would enhance the city’s reputation as a premier business tourist destination even further.

Architect’s plans have already been drawn up for the new building, which will connect the convention centre’s structure to the Customs House site via a link under Table Bay Boulevard.

Dirk Elzinga, MD of the convention centre, said plans for the demolition of Customs House had already been prepared and a start could be made on the development “very soon”.

The Cape Town International Convention Centre Company was established in mid-1999 by the Western Cape government, the City of Cape Town and Business Cape. The convention centre cost R582m.