

VISIT BY THE PUBLIC WORKS PORTFOLIO COMMITTEE TO
BRIDGE BUILDING PROGRAMME OF PHILIPPINE
GOVERNMENT AND MABEY JOHNSON.

The Portfolio Committee on Public Works (National Assembly) having undertaken a study tour to Manila in Philippines and London and Wales in Britain on 21-27 November 2005, reports as follows.

Suggestions by Mr JPI Blanché for inclusion in the Report to Parliament

Members of the Committee cannot be expected to express opinions on technical or financial aspects of the projects visited but returned with a clear picture of how the problem of damaged bridges and the backlog on bridge building in South Africa must be addressed.

The Philippine Bridge Building Programme (PBBP) has been an ongoing effort of consecutive governments of the Philippine Nation for close on a decade.

The aim of PBBP is to link all the Philippine Island communities by means of a road network that will enhance the growth of their economy and at reduced cost ensure that social services are delivered nation wide.

The PBBP is supported financially by the World Bank because it addresses poverty alleviation and shows tangible proof that the Philippine government is willing and able to establish an infrastructure which is sustainable and will bring the Philippine economy into the fold of developing self sustainable nations. The economy of the Islands is agriculturally based with the production of rice as the leading role player.

The topography of the islands is divided between low lying water logged rice field regions and mountainous areas where communities are divided by deep gorges. The country has no significant industrial competence and relies on imported skills and products to build efficient transport networks. Because of its humid climate, rust proofing of steel structures is a major cost consideration when erecting steel structures, like bridges. Concrete will interrupt rice production and disturb the environment during the erection phase.

The visit to the hosting company's manufacturing operations in Wales was an inspiring experience and the hosts must be commended and thanked by Parliament. It is an industrial enterprise that was started by an engineering family from a need that arose at the British Armed Forces

during the second world war. It has since grown into a manufacturing operation that produce bridges in an automated plant at a staggering rate of 600 bridges per year. Panel bridges is the main product produced at this operation where all steel components of the bridges are coated with rust proof material in galvanising or zinc-chrome plating processing plants. The company also employ large numbers of highly trained technical staff to oversee site development where ever bridges are erected.

The decision whether the import of these bridges into South Africa will transfer skills and alleviate poverty in rural areas should be considered by Parliament.

Reasons cited by those who favour imported bridges are:-

- (1) "It will address poverty in rural areas and bring developing communities into contact with urban development at a much faster rate." – Locally produced bridges will achieve the same and more, it will transfer manufacturing skills to Africa.
- (2) "It will transfer bridge building skills to rural communities." - The story behind this reason is that Philippine locals are supposedly used in bridge building projects. The committee never witnessed such an activity. On the day they requested to see locals who build these bridges, they were taken to a site where bridge panels were off-loaded, but where no workers were on site. Committee members were then told that worker-absence was due to a "religious-holiday". Nobody at the H