

Forging a strong future for the local steel sector

DESPITE the current turmoil in the Ukraine-Russian war zone, South African steel supplies have not been badly affected, even though these countries are two of the world's largest steel producing and exporting nations, accounting for some 20 percent of the European Union's imports of finished steel products. Nonetheless, the local steel industry still faces challenges, which the Southern African Institute of Steel Construction (SAISC) is poised to assist with. This is according to Amanuel Gebremeskel (*pictured*), Technical Director of the SAISC.



According to the SAISC the war in Europe will not create a local steel supply shortage — at least not for the moment. "As a primary steel producer and an importer of steel from China, we are keeping a careful eye on the availability of supplies, and other local challenges which must be addressed," Gebremeskel advised.

The Institute is focused on driving momentum to assist the local steel industry in tackling challenges and pivoting to make the most of new opportunities as the economy improves. "The SAISC is a custodian of steel industry knowledge and standards and we are proud of our willingness to innovate, adapt and be an industry trailblazer," said Denise Sherman, SAISC marketing director. Sherman pointed out that following the pandemic, and several years of steel sector difficulties prior to this the sector requires a champion more than ever.

'Voice' of the industry

The steel industry plays an important role in the economy and the SAISC has been

the sector's official representative body since its founding in 1956. "The Institute is respected for its reservoir of authoritative technical knowledge, and its role as the collective 'voice' of the steel construction industry," Gebremeskel said.

With access to over 60 years of local steel industry project case studies and an impressive number of experienced and highly-qualified team members, the SAISC is one of only six institutes of its kind in the world and an extremely valuable resource for the local steel industry.

"It is our particular strength to be able to see the bigger picture, while liaising with role players and organisations across the steel value chain. From engaging with the primary steel producer, merchants and fabricators — to consulting with engineers, specifiers and architects on technology and design recommendations, we play a key role for decision makers," Gebremeskel said.

The SAISC encourages interested and eligible professionals to join as members — particularly engineers and fabricators — and also looks forward to partnering with more large engineering companies, which perform such a key role in building the nation.

"We hope to play a unifying role and help South Africa to re-industrialise and thereby strengthen our economy. We are currently hard at work on one of the most important events in our annual calendar, the SAISC Steel Awards, which celebrates the use of steel in both the industry as well as daily life, and showcases our role in fostering a spirit of innovation and excellence across the steel value chain," he said.

Remaining relevant and current

Before the pandemic, the SAISC was looking at how it could improve its contribution to the industry and thereby the economy as a whole. "As South Africa moves into a post-COVID-19 recovery phase, we are looking at embracing new ways of interacting as well as returning to those aspects of our operations that have worked optimally for us in the past," Gebremeskel said.

Sherman added that during the lockdown period, the SAISC and its members adopted a remote and digital way of working. "This model definitely kept the wheels turning, and is a sign of how the SAISC is always willing to evolve in order to remain as a 'business as usual' operation during these difficult times," she said. "We have started face-to-face meetings again and we are preparing for a hybrid future, while keeping our strong heritage of facilitating in-person relationships and networking."

Local steel industry can 'shine'

Sherman noted that the SAISC is very excited to play its part in reinvigorating and repositioning the local steel industry. "Revitalising the downstream steel industry is something that we strongly endorse. The steel industry as a whole is able to drive job creation and assist with the rebuilding of the economy.

"In fact, the South African steel industry has a real opportunity to 'shine', not just locally but in terms of being a primary steel producer and exporter, given the supply chain issues currently at play in Europe and the United States. We look forward to building on our proud history," Sherman said.

Enquiry no: 17