Global team erects houses

Bruce Douglas

A team of international volunteers joined residents in uplifting the lives of the destitute last week. As part of the ArcelorMittal Foundation’s (AMF) Solidarity Holidays programme, volunteers from 11 countries across the globe spent one week erecting new homes for families in Blaauwboseh, an initiative described as a ‘labour of love’ for the South African people.

The 10 two-bedroom Protea homes were handed over to families at a function on March 28 in the area. Many of the family representatives were awash with emotion at receiving the keys to their homes, expressing heartfelt thanks to ArcelorMittal and the Amajuba District Municipality. Others danced and ululated in jubilant spirit. Maggie Mopedi, AMF correspondent and Manager of Corporate Social Responsibility and External Relations, explained the beneficiaries were selected from the Department of Social Development’s database.

“These are mostly child-headed households who live in dilapidated one-bedroom mud houses or shacks that are unstable and unfit for habitation.”

The Protea homes can be erected within two days once the concrete foundation slab is set, with self-insulating panels, extreme waterproofing and coatings to prevent rust.

“From time to time, our company becomes more innovative.”

Approximately 40 volunteers arrived at Blaauwboseh last week, following up on ArcelorMittal’s role to develop the country, which began with building houses in Mamelodi and Mthatha on Mandela Day last year.

Ms Mopedi declared the company was ‘here to stay’ as a partner in future development. Programme director, Sipho Mntambo said the handover was a momentous occasion for the ArcelorMittal Foundation, as it demonstrated appreciation of the toil of everyday people.

As a company, he continued, it was obliged to make a difference in terms of socio-economic and other matters. “Thanks to all who worked tirelessly to make things happen,” added Thembha Nkosi, also representing the steel giant.

Gerald Gadd, the General Manager of the Newcastle Works, said he was privileged to handle the ‘thank-yous’, particularly because he felt it a proud moment for the greater community.

He thanked his colleagues, municipal representatives, contractors and volunteers alike. “I must also thank the 10 families for allowing the team the chance to build houses for them.”

Mr Gadd said the project was the embodiment of ubuntu, where an intertwined community could share the same needs despite variations in diet, culture and upbringing.

A jubilant Nomusa Ngobese weeps with joy at receiving her new home.

Living in harmony with international brothers and sisters, he concluded, was the additional message of the project.

These same siblings from abroad expressed the same sentiments, thanking the South African people for their friendliness, sharing their happiness and even teaching local dance moves. “Thanks for playing soccer with me,” enthused a gleeful Constantino, who hails from France.