

## **Address at the Women's Day Celebrations 2004**

Atlantic Park Stadium, Witbank, Mpumalanga, 9 August 2004

Programme Directors,  
Premier of Mpumalanga, Thabang Makwetla,  
Honourable Minister of Arts and Culture, Pallo Jordan,  
Honourable Minister of Home Affairs, Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula,  
Honourable Ministers, Deputy Ministers, MECs and Mayors, MP's and Councillors,  
Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps,  
Distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen:

I am very happy to address you on the occasion of our National Women's Day being celebrated here in Witbank and across the country.

In this year of the First Decade of Freedom, we also celebrate the 50th anniversary of the formation of the Federation of South African Women and the adoption of the Women's Charter. We also commemorate the 48th anniversary of the renowned Women's march to the Union Buildings by the women of this country as part of their heroic struggle against apartheid.

We salute all our unsung heroines who, by their words and deeds, taught us the true meaning of courage, sacrifice and determination in pursuit of the noble goal of equality, freedom and justice for all.

This year we celebrate a decade of freedom because we were blessed to have such heroines of our struggle as Charlotte Maxeke, Margaret Mncadi, Ray Simons, Ida Ntwana, Francis Baard, Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi, Lily Diedericks, Rahima Moosa, Florence Matomela, Victoria Mxenge, and many others who throughout the long years of struggle demonstrated fortitude in confronting the most difficult conditions of organising women under severe apartheid repression.

As we make further advances in our centuries-old struggle for freedom from apartheid and colonialism, we also pay homage to our heroines who were among the first prisoners on Robben Island in the 17th century like Krotoa and Catherine of Paliacatt.

We salute too the pioneering entrepreneurship of freed slave women like Maria Everts and Angela of Bengal who are the sort of role models we seek today in empowering women to take advantage of black economic empowerment and other business opportunities available to all women.

As part of our celebrations today, we acknowledge the immense legacy of our heroines of the past and those who are still with us and continue to make their mark in building a better South Africa and a better world.

It is because of their involvement in struggle over many years that today's women are playing a central role in transforming our country into a democratic, non-racial and non-sexist society. For instance the work being done today by women trade unionists builds on the achievements of heroines such as Francis Baard, Ray Simons and others who led the struggle for the rights of workers and the possibility to broaden access to economic opportunities.

It is because of the sacrifices of women leaders such as Victoria Mxenge that we have increased the role of women in all spheres of our lives.

Indeed, walking in the footsteps of Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph and others, today women play a central role in different areas such as politics, civil service, business and civil society.

As we gather to reflect on the journey of the women whose struggles brought us liberation, we also look back at ten years of our freedom. Although we still have a lot of work to do, we have made progress in the empowerment of women, both with regard to relevant policies and in the actual implementation of these policies. Government programme of pushing back the frontiers of poverty, particularly in the rural areas, has benefited many women of this country. This work will be accelerated in the next decade of our freedom.

Because of the rich legacy inherited from our past heroines, and inspired by the African ethos of Ubuntu, we are proud that South African women are making an important contribution in helping our sisters in the rest of Africa, especially those emerging from conflict situations, to work for the consolidation of peace and stability, and plant the seeds for genuine and sustainable development.

As we celebrate Women's Day, we need further to commit ourselves to accelerate the process that we have started, of transforming South Africa from a male dominated society to a truly non-sexist, non-racial and democratic society. We need to move with the necessary speed to ensure that the totality of government do not merely pay lip service to gender equality. This applies both to the political institutions as well as the public service, so that the leadership in these structures become, in reality, appropriately representative.

Similarly, we have to work together in all sectors of business to ensure proper representation of women. We should work closely with our compatriots in business, so that together we can move away from the 'old boys club' mentality that results in the exclusion of women from positions in top and senior management, and give the women of this country the opportunity to utilise their god-given talents and expertise to drive our economy forward.

This also applies to all our professional bodies, especially in the legal, medical, accounting, engineering and higher education fields, where women representation, in top positions, is unacceptably low.

Within the context of the National Youth Development Policy Framework, on 28 August we will launch the National Youth Service Programme (NYSP).

I mention this because we expect that young women will form a significant part of the target of 5000 young people who will constitute the first intake. Government is encouraging all NGOs and projects aimed at empowering young women to register with the NYSP.

There remain many barriers which women still need to overcome as we all try to overcome extreme poverty, underdevelopment, disease, gender-based violence and many complex domestic issues.

Government has heeded the voices of the masses of our people that there instances where service delivery is too slow, and the services inadequate and often physically inaccessible. In many of these situations, especially in the rural areas, women bear the brunt of this situation of poor service delivery.

I am therefore happy that new Multi-Purpose Community Centres (MPCC) have been launched in the month of August, in the form of the Women's Caravan project. This is a mobile information and service truck, which will take some basic government services to the people, particularly those in the most remote areas of the country.

Across all provinces, we will bring the Women's Caravan and provide to our people such services as ID book applications, birth registrations, marriage verification, social grants applications, access to the Poverty Alleviation Programme, and assistance to SMMEs, so that as many of our people as possible are given the opportunity to engage in business activities and by so doing help to grow our economy and alleviate poverty.

Further, the National Prosecuting Authority will have a mobile service to assist women with maintenance issues, with assistance also being provided through the Public Internet Terminals.

In addition, government will intensify work around efficient administration of social grants and also give advice on government services to prevent gender-based violence, including shelters and counseling for abused women.

These are some of the steps we must take to improve on what has been done. In Mpumalanga, you can visit these mobile centres this week in Ogies and Kendall Town Halls.

Chairpersons,

We need concrete measures with regard to the empowerment of women to make the necessary progress in ensuring that women take leading roles in business, politics and other areas of our lives.

Accordingly, I was very happy to learn of the achievements of Monica Dzwino of Mpumalanga who is a woman sub-contractor to Trans Africa Concession (TRAC), which has now empowered eight woman sub-contractors in the Maputo Corridor Toll Road. I know that there are many other examples throughout the country. But we need many more women to be given opportunities like Monica so that empowerment of women is not just a matter of theory.

I am told that Monica, the 2000 winner of the prestigious Pan African Broadcast and Heritage Achievement Award for women builders in Africa, has a team of workers in her company which is contracted to install underground drains and to prevent soil erosion along the Maputo Corridor Toll Road that passes through Mpumalanga.

Another inspiring story is the recent title bestowed on Candice Morgan as Miss Deaf World in Prague. Candice has broadened sensitivity to the issue of the empowerment of women with disabilities, through her work with Deaf Television.

Women across South Africa are providing us with shining examples of what each and every one of us can and must do to re-build our communities, our cities and towns, our provinces, our beautiful country, South Africa and our continent.

We will also remember that last year, in Maputo, the African Union adopted the Protocol to The African Charter On Human And People's Rights on The Rights Of Women In Africa. We need to work together, as social formations and government, in collaboration with others in our sister countries, to ensure that we implement this important Protocol.

This is important because the Protocol addresses the central challenge of the emancipation of African women and goes beyond the simple recognition of the rights of women, but enjoins all Africans actively to remove all forms of gender discrimination, integrating the gender perspective in policy decisions, legislation, development plans, programmes and activities and demands that corrective and positive action should be taken in those areas where discrimination against women continues to exist.

We must also work to realise the goal set at the last Summit of the African Union of achieving gender parity in all decision making bodies in our country.

We also face the important task further to mobilize the millions of women in our country actively to participate in the struggle for their emancipation and gender equality. We must build on the tradition established by the heroic women who contributed to our liberation to ensure that women today continue to be activists and fighters for their own emancipation, contributing to the achievement of the goal of a better life for all.

Let us celebrate Women's Day with great pride and joy. Let's us renew our commitment to gender equality and build a prosperous and peaceful nation free from all forms of discrimination and poverty.

Thank you.