

**Address by Gauteng MEC for Education, Sports, Arts, Culture and Recreation during the Women's Day celebrations**

*Union Buildings*

*09 August 2024*

Program Director

MECs present

Mayors and MMCs present

Representatives of the various spheres of our government

Stakeholders in their varying capacities

Distinguished guests

Malibongwe,

Today, we gather to honor and celebrate the women of our nation, whose courage, strength, and resilience have shaped the history of South Africa. Women's Day is not merely a date on the calendar; it is a reminder of women's struggles, the triumphs they have achieved, and the ongoing journey towards equality and justice.

Sixty-eight years ago today, the indomitable spirit of South African women shone brightly as they converged on the Union Buildings, united in their quest for freedom, justice, and equality. Their collective resistance against the oppressive pass laws galvanized 20,000 women in one of the most significant protests against apartheid. This historic march remains a testament to the courage and tenacity of our women, who fought valiantly to dismantle the triple oppression of race, class, and gender.

Women's Month is very important for us as it stands as a pivotal time in our political and social calendar, commemorating the unity and resilience of women from all walks of life who laid the groundwork for a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, and prosperous South Africa.

The rallying cry, "Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo," encapsulates the strength of women, who have been the backbone of our society, placing their struggles within the broader fight for national liberation. These trailblazing women recognized that their freedom would ultimately herald the liberation of all society.

As we commemorate this month, it is crucial that the older generation imparts the rich legacy of women's struggles and leadership to the youth, especially young girls. This will contribute towards our efforts to ensure that Women's Month retains its revolutionary essence and is not reduced to mere commercialism. We must without any reservation and shame, honor, celebrate, and remember the monumental contributions and sacrifices made by women in our liberation movement.

Program Director,

Today, we honor the legacies of icons such as Charlotte Maxeke, Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Ida Ntwana, Amina Cachalia, Victoria Mxenge, Rahima Moosa, Florence Mophosho, Dorothy Nyembe, Ruth First, Getrude Shope, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Adelaide Tambo, Albertina Sisulu, Sophie De Bruyn, Dulcie September, and countless others whose sacrifices paved the way for our democracy.

We also acknowledge the countless unnamed women who played pivotal roles behind the scenes, ensuring that every oppressive policy of the apartheid regime was met with fierce resistance. We recognize the ongoing efforts of millions of women who, within our democratic framework, continue to ensure that women's voices are an integral part of South Africa's progress. Malibongwe!

In the early 20th century, women began organizing against laws designed to strip them of their rights. The formation of the Bantu Women's League in 1913 marked the start of organized resistance by African women, with Charlotte Maxeke spearheading the fight against pass laws. Her words, *"This work is not for yourselves, kill that spirit of self, and do not live above your people, but with them,"* echo through the ages, reminding us of the selflessness and dedication of these women in their quest for justice.

As we celebrate three decades of democracy, we fully acknowledge the crucial role women played in our transition and the shaping of our nation's future. The 1996 adoption of a new Constitution, which enshrined women's rights and established a framework for gender equality, was realized through the relentless efforts of women demanding to be heard.

Reflecting on our 30 years of democracy, we must take stock of the progress made in uplifting and empowering women. We can be proud of creating a society with a non-sexist outlook, where women enjoy the same rights as their male counterparts, regardless of race, creed, religion, education level, or sexual orientation. Our government, heeding the persistent voices of women, has implemented policies aimed at

economically empowering women to combat poverty, which disproportionately affects them.

Ladies and gentlemen

Former President Nelson Mandela once remarked, "Freedom cannot be achieved unless the women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression." These words remind us that the freedom we enjoy today was hard-won and that it is incomplete without the full realization of women's rights.

Thirty years into democracy, women today continue to break barriers and make strides in every field—politics, business, science, education, and the arts. Yet, we must be first to acknowledge that the fight is not over. Gender-based violence, economic inequality, and discrimination still plague our society. As a nation, we must commit ourselves to addressing these issues with the same vigor and determination as the women who marched in 1956.

As we know, Sports play a vital role in addressing issues of social cohesion and correcting the injustices rooted in the colonial and apartheid legacies that have entrenched tribalism, racism, and xenophobia. We need to support women's sports and women participating in male-dominated sports, including teams like Banyana Banyana, the Spar Proteas national netball team etc.. It is concerning that men in sports consistently receive financial and moral support from society, while women are deprived of equal support. This must change.

Additionally, women today face crimes against their bodies and gendered poverty. There is an urgent need for society to create a safe environment for women wherever they find themselves. The government must enforce laws to ensure women are protected against rape and abuse. Our Police Ministry and Community Safety unit must professionalize the Community Police Forum (CPF) in various townships.

Generally speaking, equitably distributing economic resources has the potential to decrease gendered poverty, so by empowering women to make independent decisions without being constrained by a saturated structural economy. This would prevent them from enduring abusive relationships due to a lack of income. This also includes decentralizing the economy to rural areas and towns by building business infrastructures and providing efficient transport systems in these regions.

As we celebrate Women's Day, let us honor the legacy of the women who came before us. Let us be inspired by their courage and resilience, and let us recommit ourselves to the pursuit of a society where all women are free, equal, and empowered.

In the words of Albertina Sisulu, "Women are the people who are going to relieve us from all this oppression and depression." Let us carry forward their legacy by continuing to fight for a South Africa where every woman and girl can live in dignity and with the freedom to pursue her dreams.

Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo!

Malibongwe

I Thank you.