



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

MINISTRY OF WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES

**ADDRESS BY PROFESSOR HLENGIWE MKHIZE, DEPUTY
MINISTER IN THE DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN YOUTH AND
PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
DURING THE OCCASION
OF
UNCSW 65th SESSION
STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATION
ON
DATE: 01 MARCH 2021
10:00 – 13:00**

Online Webinar via Zoom

Programme Director: Ms Mmabatho Ramagoshi;

Honourable Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane;

Director General: Adv. Joyce Maluleke;

United Nations Women Multi-Country Representative: Ms Anne Githuku-Shongwe;

Representatives of Civil Society Organizations connecting from various locations;

Officials from across government;

Good Morning;

It gives me great pleasure to address you at this public consultation ahead of what will surely be a historic gathering of the Commission on the Status of Women. Not only will this consultation adopt a virtual and physical format, it will be held at a time when a new biological threat has become gendered in the way it impacts on societies.

In outlining the purpose of the national stakeholder consultation today we have a new agenda, COVID-19 which laid bare inequalities in society with the majority of women who were already poor being left more vulnerable. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this vulnerability further in the country whereby women were confined in close proximity in households with their abusers. The lockdown measures also obstructed victims and survivors of gender based violence being able to

access essential and critical services.

I'd like to remind all of us that this is a critical period wherein we have to analyse interventions made and step up the effort in such a way that developing countries in future are not left behind when it comes fighting international disasters.

In the first ten years after 1994 South Africa was at the forefront of some of the most progressive gender equality legislation in the world, including laws on termination of pregnancy, sexual orientation, and the rights of women under customary law. The rights of women workers are protected through progressive labour laws. Women's economic and social empowerment is promoted through legislation and related policies, charters and quotas.

Women's access to justice and protection against domestic violence, sexual offences, rape and harassment are promoted through legislation globally acclaimed as very forward looking. In the recent past, laws adopted since 1994, have been amended to further entrench women's empowerment and equality such as in ensuring the principle of equal pay for work of equal value.

Currently, President just signed into law the Prescription in Civil and Criminal Matters (Sexual Offences) Amendment Bill, 2019 which removes time barriers on when a sexual assault may be reported. We are also currently in the process of consulting on the Land Expropriation Bill which will in part, bring justice to many women who have been denied access to land or have had land taken away from them.

This goes to show the lengths we have gone in order to close down legislative barriers hindering women's progress. Although we have made these visible changes, we are cognisant of the fact that there are many more challenges ahead of us. Success is so near but yet so far; we still have attitudinal barriers to deal with, whereby we need to come up with reforms to do away with norms and societal behaviours which are still holding us back.

It is attitudinal barriers that is our greatest challenge as a collective. Allow me to remind you that in the 1980s the Commission helped bring violence against women to the forefront of international debates for the first time. These efforts resulted in the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women adopted by the General Assembly on 20 December 1993.

In 1994, a UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences was appointed by the Commission on Human Rights, with a mandate to investigate and report on all aspects of violence against women.

In South Africa, 25 years later, we still continue to report on high levels of violence and an increase in the brutality of violence meted out on the bodies of women that makes us question even the humanity of our male counterparts.

South African women have a long struggle history against patriarchy, suppression, discrimination, subjugation and women's suffrage, and many gains have been achieved through

a strong, robust and vibrant women's movement.

Behaviourisms inculcated from a young age and massaged by a patriarchal society weave in a deep seeded belief in inequality of women, manifesting in a range of inequalities, the most violent of which is the abuse, sexual assault, rape, mutilation, and murder of women every day.

The National Development Plan (NDP): Vision 2030 – “Our future, make it work, was adopted in 2012, as South Africa's development loadstar and roadmap. It predated the 2015 adoption of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the African Union (AU) Agenda 2063 - “The Africa we want”. The NDP has a 74% convergence with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and prioritises job creation, the elimination of poverty, the reduction of inequality and growing an inclusive economy by 2030.

Furthermore, women have made significant progress in the space of leadership, leading not only in their home countries but also taking up leadership positions globally. We have just witnessed the appointment of Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala as the Director General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) following Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka who is the Executive Director of UN Women. This is the progressive movement and upliftment of women we have all been yearning for.

Notwithstanding the significant progress that South Africa has made on its developmental journey since the advent of democracy in 1994, the country remains amongst the most

unequal societies in the world. Achieving the SDGs is therefore in South Africa's best interest as the country pursues the vision of the Constitution of a united, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous nation, at peace with itself and the rest of the world.

Our recent achievements in working together to put together the working tool that is the National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence, and the raising of R128 Million by the Private Sector shows our continued commitment to investing resources in the mission to eradicate GBV.

Government's commitment of R12 Billion over the next five years to respond to GBV shows our recognition of economic empowerment as a tool to free women from oppressive situations that have them chained in through economic dependency.

As the Chair of the African Union, President Ramaphosa declared the next decade as the decade of gender equality, financial inclusion, and economic empowerment of women.

President Ramaphosa stated, and I quote:

I call on Heads of State to make catalytic change at national level that will have multiplier effects on the continent. We must ensure 50% representation of women in all decision making bodies.

"For example, to attain women's financial inclusion and economic empowerment, we must look beyond micro-finance solutions and invest in solutions that target the full range of constraints that women face in growing their businesses," the President said.

He further called on member States to actively participate in the Beijing + 25 World Conference on Women celebrations, such as the Gender Equality Forums, as well as global and regional sessions taking place. South Africa has hosted a session in July 2020.

In addition, President Ramaphosa said the Union must commit all member States to preferential public procurement legislation requiring 30% of all government procurement go to women owned businesses, and adopt an annual monitoring framework for the same.

He also stated that member States must repeal all discriminatory laws by December 2026. "We will encourage all AU Member States to commit to gender parity in national cabinets and gender equal parliaments by 2030," said the President.

Today we converge virtually in consultation with various Civil Society Organization representatives to prepare for the 65th session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) which will take place from 15 to 26 March 2021. The theme for this year's CSW is **"Women's full and effective participation and decision-making in public life, as well as the elimination of violence, for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls."**

To ensure accountability to each other, the CSW also engages on the review theme which focuses on Women's empowerment and the link to sustainable development based on the Agreed Conclusions of the Sixtieth Session (CSW60).

Our deliberations should therefore take both themes into account as well as the Africa position as deliberated on by African Ministers of Gender and Women Affairs on Friday 26th February 2021.

Once more, this is an opportunity to evaluate progress made and cement coalitions as well as partnerships with civil society so as to progress at a faster rate. We are this generation which has to finally defeat gender inequality and all its social ills.

Thank you