

Keynote Address for the
Launch of the Circle of Global Business Women

Delivered by:

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Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities,
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International Chamber of Commerce Representative, Ms Valentinah Mintah

French South African Chamber of Commerce and Industry Representative, Yves Guenon

Esteemed Delegates and Guests

It gives me great pleasure to address an audience of such accomplished women who are expressing their commitment to building a better tomorrow, and to lift others as they continue to rise.

As the Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, It is an honour to be amongst women leaders and be part of this launch as I support the principles of women economic empowerment.

France is a country steeped in tradition and recognises its past through national days like Jour de la Victoire 1945 – WWII Victory Day 1945 and Bastille Day in July. In the same vein South Africa has signalled the month of April to recognise South Africa's difficult past in attaining freedom.

During this month we celebrate the liberation of our country and its people. Since 1994, South Africa has made significant progress in putting in place a comprehensive

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Thank you for the opportunity to address this engagement during the month of April, in which we celebrate Freedom Day in South Africa. ...



and multidimensional legislative and policy framework for advancing human rights, equality and the empowerment of women.

South Africa has sought to protect and promote these human rights and thereby foster human dignity for women. We have made gains in advancing women's rights, in broadening women's access to education, health care, and social support as well as in improving their participation in the economy and decision-making positions.

South Africa is able to boast about its women's representation in leadership and decision-making positions. Our country demonstrates strong political will and commitment with 50-50 gender parity at the Executive level, including 50% of Cabinet Ministers being women.

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Equally, our country has an impressive 46% representation of women in the national legislature; 41% of women in Local Government; 38% women judges and 44% women magistrates in the judiciary; and 42% women in senior management in the Public Service. This continues to grow.

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In the 27 years of democracy we however still observe marginalisation of women. We have worked extremely hard to eliminate racial discrimination, however, gender inequality remains palpable. The most vulnerable being women, young girls, and persons with disabilities, in our communities continue to persistently face the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality.

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Society remains ceased in a patriarchal quagmire that manifests inequality in multiple ways, with the most violent being gender-based violence.

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For the benefit of members of this engagement, allow me introduce the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (DWYPD). We are a centre of government department established to advance the development agenda with gender equality, youth development and disability rights as central tenets. We thus support and encourage effective coordination and coherence, adequate allocation of resources, mainstreaming the meaningful inclusion and participation of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (WYPD). By construct this requires accelerating economic empowerment programmes and the effective monitoring and evaluation, in order to meaningful track progress towards these objectives.

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By implication we must have a commitment to dedicating resources aimed at ending gender-based violence, supporting women socio-economic empowerment, and ensuring gender equality through infrastructure development, focusing on empowering youth, creating job opportunities and empowering persons with disabilities through increased access to productive opportunities.

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The department has developed a Women's Financial Inclusion Framework which seeks to address gaps in women's inclusion in the mainstream economy. The framework on Women's Financial Inclusion will improve guided efforts towards gender equality and women economic empowerment from a government perspective, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal 5 which aims to achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030

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It targets areas of exclusion of women from economic activities and further encourages the equality of women within our society – particularly women found in the less empowered rural and township areas of our country.

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The strongest argument for women's financial inclusion is economic, as access to finance increases the likelihood of owning or accessing productive assets will in turn support women's productivity and economic participation, it must however be understood to be inter-dependant on the need for non-financial support – which is a complimentary requirement for sustaining the said opportunities.

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In our journey to attaining true and meaningful transformation we must reimagine our African based solutions with a new frame of thinking, one which advances our current socio-economic standing beyond the primary causes that have affected the position that we now find ourselves in as a country.

We have ensured that the Medium Term Strategic Framework (MTSF: 2019 to 2024 of government explicitly covers inclusivity and gender-sensitive targets. Government departments' minimum targets for all government programmes for inclusive participation should be 40% for women, 30% for Youth and 7% for persons with disabilities.

This has been recently reaffirmed in one of our sittings, President in his own words expressed that our economic recovery plan is not about a return to what was, but about transformation to what is next. We have to both recover the ground that we have lost due to the coronavirus pandemic, and to gain new ground by placing our



economy on a fundamentally different growth trajectory. We have to use this moment to forge a new economy in a new global reality. This includes seeing an increased participation of women at various economic sectors and at leadership roles.

As we imagine a transformed economy, we need to picture the face of business to be that of a rural black woman. We need to hold this vision central to our conversations on ensuring grassroot and local development through decentralised procurement, broadening our supplier bases, and creating new markets.

We must also recognise our regional, continental and global responsibilities towards women's empowerment. After all, this is why we are here today. We must seek out excellence. For example, this Forum must connect with Dr Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala of the sisterly Federal Republic of Nigeria - the Director-General of the World Trade Organisation. Her appointment coincides with the ongoing implementation of the AU's African Continental Free Trade Agreement (ACfTA). We underscored the importance of women's leadership and participation in the ACfTA process to ensure financial inclusion and economic empowerment.

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Inevitably, this forum will have to involve itself with the political stability of countries. We are unable to grow economically if we are unstable politically. During March, South Africa also launched the National Action Plan on the implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security.

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I would also like to share with you that South Africa assumed its Chairship for the 66th and 67th session following the closing of the 65th Session of the Commission on the

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Status of Women held from 15 and 26 March 2021 under the Priority theme: *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.* This is a first in the country's participation at CSW.

As the Chair of the 66th and 67th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women, in 2022 South Africa will lead the Commission under the Priority theme: *Achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls in the context of climate change, environmental and disaster risk reduction policies and programmes.* Review theme: *Women's economic empowerment in the changing world of work (agreed conclusions of the sixty-first session).* In 2023 it will preside over the Commission under the Priority theme: *Innovation and technological change, and education in the digital age for achieving gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls.* Review theme: *Challenges and opportunities in achieving gender equality and the empowerment of rural women and girls (agreed conclusions of the sixty-second session).*

We must be able to tell the story of women's economic empowerment on the continent and how Africa is leading the way.

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Within the context of "*leaving no one behind*" and hashtag "*what women want*", under this Chairship South Africa will ensure that the world accelerates (a) women's economic and financial empowerment and inclusion; (b) demand for equal pay and fair labour practices; (c) women's access to education and technology and skills development; (d) participation of women in the green industry; (e) equal sharing of unpaid care and domestic work; (f) an end to sexual harassment and abuse and all form of violence against women and girls; (g) responsive health care services to the

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needs of women and girls including sexual and reproductive health and rights; (h) equal participation of women in political life and decision-making in all areas of life; and (i) land ownership for women, as well as cultural beliefs that are prejudiced against women.

Esteemed Guests,

COVID-19 has torn families apart, led to many homes being left in mourning, catastrophic impacts felt across global economies and worsened already existing inequalities, further widened gaps in accessing economic opportunities, healthcare and education for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (WYPD). However we can reimagine our future by placing critical structural foundations in place to systematically accelerate our envisioned national growth and development objectives – truly inclusive, truly transformed, home grown and inspired by our country's collective wisdom.

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We support our President and the country's national initiatives to inspire such growth in order to fast-track the delivery of structural economic reforms. Operation Vulindlela is one among these which aims to reduce input costs, lower barriers to entry and increase competition. Lowered costs and greater efficiency increases the competitiveness of our economy and creates new growth opportunities for investment. Indeed by accelerating the implementation of such reforms we will support rapid and inclusive growth by reforming network industries to modernise and transform the economy, it will lower barriers to entry to make it easier for businesses to start, grow, and compete, it will create greater levels of economic inclusion and address high levels of economic concentration and result in higher levels of employment as growth accelerates.

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Some of the above objectives we believe can be achieved through Integrated Enterprise and Entrepreneurship Development Programmes that provide specialist skills training and support to assist WYPD to establish, maintain, grow and sustain their own enterprises or co-operatives as well as providing targeted financial and non-financial support measures for enterprise development purposes.

The Covid19 Pandemic has come as a shock to all nations, it has further plagued progress towards the economic empowerment and participation of WYPD. The Presidential Employment Stimulus initiative is an important intervention in terms of the impact it has had on the livelihoods of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities (WYPD). It is an important initiative as it aims to support a spectrum of opportunities, focusing on job creation through public employment; on job retention in vulnerable sectors; on direct support to livelihood strategies; as well as on fast-tracking high-impact employment enablers. We are all aware that the unemployment levels in our country have reached a dire situation, in particular for the youth and women.

Realising a transformed economy built on the meaningful inclusion of WYPD across all sectors is sacrosanct to us. To this end we seek to improve equitable access to employment in collaboration with private sector; we want to ensure that all Master Plans are inclusive of WYPD; we advocate for the enforcement of public procurement targets for WYPD to be put in place; we encourage expanded access and support for WYPD owned SMMEs and informal sector be prioritised; and the expansion of access to Youth Micro-Enterprise Relief Funds. In these trying times we need to ensure we endow our future by investing in the youth of today. We must continue to promote and encourage measures that increase access to financial resources, ownership, management and control of productive resources across all sectors. Bargaining



power needs to be systemically transferred through the intentional promotion of opening greater access to local, regional and global markets.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I would be remiss not to speak about Gender-Based Violence and its impact on the economy and women's freedom of movement.

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The structure and functioning of the economy, currently thrives on devaluing women, undermining their agency and safety as well as through exploiting their labour. At the personal/intimate level, economic abuse often manifests through the financial control of women in relationships, and when they leave these relationships, through withholding financial resources, particularly as it relates to maintenance of children. Therefore, strategically linking efforts to reclaiming economic power to simultaneously changing the social position of women, and their specific vulnerabilities to different forms of GBV, is an approach aligned with a vision of eradicating GBV in South Africa.

Furthermore, deliberately harnessing the work place as a platform from which to implement GBV prevention and response interventions is important. The workplace is subsidised by the private sector and provides an important opportunity to ensure the accountability of the business community by leveraging opportunities for transformation of the work place to reduce the economy's violence towards women as well as addressing workplace violence such as sexual harassment. The economic impact of women's social position, as most often primary care givers of children, requires specific supportive actions by employers to address the undue economic hardship and vulnerability that this places on them.

The National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (NSP: GBVF) is a multi-sectoral policy and programming framework that sets out to strengthen a coordinated national response to the crisis of gender-based violence and femicide. It does so by, amongst others, highlighting the importance of addressing critical



structural driver to women's sustained vulnerabilities to violence. Pillar 5 of the NSP: GBVF recognizes economic inequality as a systemic form of gender-based violence and focusses on women's attainment of economic power as a means to gender justice.

Overall, this pillar seeks to proactively respond to and transform the structural drivers of gender-based violence through initiatives that challenge women's unequal economic and social position, proactively address systemic discrimination and inequality whilst holding government and employers accountable for making workplaces and public spaces safe for women and LGBTQIA+ persons. Key to this is the acceleration of initiatives to address women's unequal economic and social position specifically through access to government and private sector procurement, employment, housing, land, financial resources and income generation initiatives.

These outcomes should be supported by initiatives, including but not limited to, those that seek to: (a) advance placement of women in jobs at all levels including business ownership schemes; (b) introduce strict child maintenance regulations and enforceable penalties that significantly restrict movement and freedom of defaulters; (c) take a gender transformative approach to access to land (d) adoption and implementation of policies that seek to shift economic power and eliminate existing gender inequalities. Another key focus over the next five years is to ensure safe work places that are free from violence against women and LGBTQIA+ persons.

In light of the current context of heightened social and economic vulnerability because of the intersecting crises, Pillar 5 seeks radical and imaginative ways to ensure economic power for women. A radical restructuring of systematic conditioning requires strong accountability systems to be instituted in favour of women's economic power. To this end, a multi-sectoral team leading the strategic approach to the



effective implementation of Pillar 5 sets out to provide a public platform to engage and explore the degree to which the economy of South Africa, particularly Covid-19 relief measures, have benefitted women.

I would also like to announce that the Private Sector Fund established by the international Women's Forum South Africa raised R128 Million from private sector donors to fight GBVF. The Fund will be led by the private sector, with the International Women's Forum South Africa playing the leading role in its establishment. This collaborative approach between interdependent stakeholders in combating GBVF reinforces the fact that a thriving business and economy is dependent on social stability.

Land remains a critical debate, however the debate must evolve into action and meaningful participation to attaining our collective goals of growth and development. We envisage developing the productive capacity of our people through various agro-processing activities as well as related services across the sector. Ensuring the equitable implementation of the Rural Development Programme, supported by food security programmes that alleviate the vice of poverty stricken communities and subsequently the most vulnerable among our society.

We will leverage on the Sanitary Dignity Programme's (SDP's) value chains to ensure that our women remain at the forefront of this sectors development. This is a sector that is made up and supported by innovative industries, these are growth nodal points we must make full use of in terms of empowering our WYPD, within its core industries is an opportunity for a truly inclusive sector built on manufacturing, storage, packaging, transportation, distribution, waste management and disposal. Herein we have the distinct opportunity to truly build a sector that is fully representative of the

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transformational patterns and principles we wish to see enshrined across all sectors in terms of thriving women owned and led enterprises.

Public Procurement budgets are a critical strategy towards achieving our transformational agenda not only in the SDP value chain but across all sectors of our economy through easing barriers of entry and access for enterprises through tailored supplier development opportunities offered by the state. The 40% set aside for public procurement would be monitored to ensure that women owned enterprises benefit.

The saying “Information is power” holds valuable meaning. It is the gateway to opening up access and we will as part of our interventions across the financial year we will be strengthening our efforts by hosting Economic Empowerment Radio Shows and workshops on Agriculture Value Chain Opportunities, Economic Empowerment Opportunities in Green Industries as well as African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCTA) Awareness Workshop to benefit our WYPD across the country.

As I conclude, let me once again appreciate this formation. I would urge all of us to remember that marginalisation of disadvantaged groups only weakens our country’s resilience, so our efforts should enable the pulling of people in from the periphery rather than hoping for inclusion.

Let us collectively continue to steer and promote the socio-economic transformation, implementation, empowerment and participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities across all sectors of the country’s economy, by strategically facilitating the coordination of interventions within our national machinery and in collaborative partnership with our implementing inter-departmental, civil and private sector partners.



I THANK YOU

