



**ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR
WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES,
HON. SINDISIWE CHIKUNGA, MP**

**AT THE G20 EMPOWERMENT OF WOMEN WORKING
GROUP SIDE EVENT**

*“BRIDGING GENERATIONS, TRANSFORMING
MASCULINITIES: CULTURE, FAITH AND CARE IN MODERN
SOUTH AFRICA.”*

Date: Monday, 20 October 2025

Time: 09:00 – 15:00

Venue: Balalaika Hotel, Sandton, Johannesburg, Gauteng

SECTION 1 - SALUTATIONS & OPENING

- Programme Directors, Advocate **Joyce Maluleke**,
Director-General of the Department of Women, Youth and
Persons with Disabilities, and Dr **Matome Kganakga**,
Chairperson of the Men’s Parliament;
- **Kgosi Thabo Seatlholo**, Chairperson of the National
House of Traditional and Khoisan Leaders;
- **His Majesty King Misuzulu kaZwelithini Zulu**;
Their Majesties and Royal Highnesses — **Queen Mbaso
Mapotelwa**, and **Queen Nomzamo KaMyeni Zulu**;

**Princess Khushe Mtirara, Princess Daisy Sedume,
Princess Moshibudi Makgoba, Princess Tshepi
Motlounq,**

- From the United Nations family: **Mr Nelson Muffuh**, UN Resident Coordinator for South Africa.
- **Ms Jane Marie Ongolo**, Regional Representative, UNODC;
- **Ms Aleta Miller**, UN Women Representative;
- **Mr Yu Yu**, UNFPA Representative;
- Our partners from **AUDA-NEPAD**, led by **Ms Jessica Annor**;
- Esteemed leaders of faith communities, academia, civil society, and the media;
Youth leaders and advocates;
- Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen —

Good morning.

We gather under a profound and timely theme: ***“Bridging Generations, Transforming Masculinities — Culture, Faith and Care in Modern South Africa”***. This is more than a discussion about gender; it is a moment of collective **reflection, responsibility, and renewal**.

Under **South Africa’s G20 Presidency** — the first on African soil — we have coined this G20, **Africa’s G20; the People’s**

G20, led under the banner “***Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability***”. This theme, asks whether the promises we make on global stages are felt in homes, in communities, and in the futures of our children.

Today’s dialogue is an **official side event of the G20 Empowerment of Women Working Group (EWWG)** of which the Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women, Youth and Persons with disabilities chairs. Today’s purpose is clear. It is to bring the lived wisdom of **faith leaders, traditional leaders, youth, civil society, and partners** into the EWWG’s policy work, so that what we table at the **Ministerial Meeting, next week** reflects the voices of our people from all walks of life.

Programme Director, we must be honest about the gap we must close. This G20 has advocated for the advancement of women’s empowerment, because too often the engine of inequality and **patriarchal masculinities** have gone unchallenged. That is why we meet under this theme, to ask how **faith can heal rather than harm**, how **culture can affirm dignity rather than dominance**, and how **care** can move from the shadows of women’s unpaid labour to a **shared social and economic priority**.

South Africa does not arrive empty-handed to this discussion. We are guided by the **National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide**. On the continent, we serve as the **African Union Presidential Champion on Positive**

Masculinity, advancing the **AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls**. This dialogue is therefore a **bridge between community insight and global policy** - a space to shape **concrete recommendations** we will carry into the **EWVG Ministerial**.

If this G20 is truly **Africa's G20 — the People's G20** — then our measure should be: **do the decisions we take in Johannesburg change how families live, how communities care, and how men and women share power?** That is the work before us today.

Section 2 — What We Are Here to Confront

Programme Director,

We are gathered to confront a deeply entrenched truth: which is, **inequality is sustained at the intersection of belief, custom and power**.

I am of the view that, the challenge is not faith or culture themselves, but rather how they are sometimes interpreted and practised in ways that **legitimise male dominance, silence women and girls, and normalise violence and exclusion**.

Globally, these intersections are well documented. The United Nations reports that **around 650 million women and girls alive today were married before the age of 18**, with the

highest prevalence in **West and Central Africa**, where **41 percent** of girls are married as children. The **World Health Organization** estimates that **230 million women and girls worldwide have undergone female genital mutilation** — a 15 percent increase since 2016. These practices violate women's rights to health, dignity, education and bodily integrity, as affirmed by the **Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)** and the **Maputo Protocol**, which obliges states to eliminate discrimination in both law and life.

Across Africa, patriarchal norms remain deeply embedded in faith and cultural systems. Studies by **UN Women** and **Afrobarometer** show that even where women's equality is recognised in principle, it is often **undermined in practice** by male-dominated religious and customary leadership structures, and by interpretations of scripture that equate obedience with virtue and authority with manhood.

In South Africa, these dynamics take on painful, visible forms. We have seen **girls married off to older men under the cover of religion**, from KwaZulu-Natal to the Eastern Cape; we have seen **ukuthwala** — the abduction of young girls for marriage — misused to justify coercion; and **ukungenwa**, a custom exercised on widows, which still continues in some communities. Each of these violates the law and the moral core of our

traditions. So, **let us be clear**, under-age and coerced unions are **crimes**, not culture or faith.

The Human Sciences Research Council's 2022 National Study on GBV found that **one in three South African women — more than seven million people — has experienced physical violence**, while **one in five men admitted perpetration**.

The economic cost is just as severe. **Unpaid care work**, still carried almost entirely by women, traps millions outside the labour market. Globally, women perform **2.8 times more unpaid care and domestic work than men**. In South Africa, this translates into fewer hours of paid employment, lower earnings, and limited access to decision-making positions — a direct contributor to the **gender pay gap** and to women's poverty.

You see, inequality begins not in policy or legislation but in the household. When a girl child becomes pregnant, she is forced to stay at home while the boy who impregnated her continues with school. When parents fall ill or younger siblings need care, it is the girl child who is withdrawn from class to shoulder the burden, while her brother is allowed to sleep in and dream freely. These are not acts of culture; they are acts of injustice — and they reinforce a cycle in which girls' futures are sacrificed to protect boys' comfort.

So, distinguished guests, our task today is therefore not theoretical. It is to dismantle the architecture of inequality — in pulpits and in parliaments, in cultural councils and in households — and to replace it with a culture of care, equality, and accountability that gives practical expression to our Constitution's promise of dignity and freedom for all.

Section 3 — What We Are Doing, and What Must Be Done Next

Programme Director,

If we are to change how families live, how communities care, and how men and women share power, it cannot be by sentiment alone. It must be through **policy, programme, and partnership**.

In South Africa, we have begun to put real substance behind our commitments. In 2020 we launched the **National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide**, backed by a multi-billion-rand baseline investment. We are now establishing the **National Council on GBVF** to ensure coordination and accountability beyond any single administration. On the frontline, services have expanded—**Thuthuzela Care Centres**, funded shelters, and police **Victim-Friendly Rooms** are providing life-saving support across the country. Parliament has strengthened the legal framework with the **National Council on GBVF Act**,

the **Domestic Violence Amendment Act**, and the **Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act**—because safety must be guaranteed not by goodwill, but by law.

Under **South Africa's G20 Presidency**, and in our **Chairship of the Empowerment of Women Working Group**, we are advancing a **legacy agenda** that connects the global to the local. A flagship within this is the **Positive Masculinity Initiative**, a partnership between the **Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities** and the **GBVF Response Fund**, United Nations Resident Office and related UN Offices. The Initiative focuses on **redefining manhood and transforming social norms**: engaging men and boys through schools, faith spaces, initiation forums, sports and workplaces; supporting communities to adopt **local charters on positive masculinity**; training male champions; and strengthening early-prevention pathways so that harm is addressed before it becomes violence. Later this month we will convene the **Positive Masculinity Conference** to consolidate this national framework and align it with the broader G20 effort.

Our G20 Legacy projects, also include the development of Care Work Policy and Strategy. We are in the process of establishing a Disability Inclusion Nerve Centre, to address all issues faced by persons with disabilities.

Our **traditional leadership** has taken up this call. We have as a ministry been working closely with the **National House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders** to advance gender equality in customary spaces through dialogue and economic participation, we even attended the launch of the **Queens Forum earlier this year**, which provides a platform for women in traditional leadership to drive prevention, protection and economic empowerment. We must further institutionalise traditional women's leadership by resourcing the **Queens Forum**, integrating it into national coordination bodies, and ensuring women's representation within every decision-making space. The Queens Forum can also steward **standards and training for practices that implicate girls' dignity**, including **ukuhlolwa** — ensuring it is **lawful, voluntary and respectful**, with **trained practitioners, reproductive-health education, privacy and consent**, and **clear referral pathways** to health and psychosocial services where needed.

We have seen leaders such as **His Majesty King Misuzulu kaZwelithini** host community campaigns against GBVF, and other royal houses join hands to restore the moral authority of culture as a force for dignity and justice. We now need to **localise this work**. Perhaps **induna namaKhosi** should lead regular community programmes in their areas — mentoring boys, supporting couples and families, convening dialogues on culture

and care, and linking households to services — so that **culture remains a source of protection, not pain.**

We also commend the **Department of Higher Education and Training**, through its entity - Higher Health, for its **Transforming Men-talities Programme** — a national initiative launched to challenge toxic masculinities and gender stereotypes across universities and TVET colleges, engaging male students, peer educators and staff in redefining what it means to be a man in a democratic, equal society.

Our **faith communities** are equally vital. Right at the beginning of our term we met with the **South African Council of Churches** to discuss a range of areas of common interest including the advancement of the rights of women and girls. Around the world, religion shapes identity and behaviour—and it can shape them toward equality. We therefore call for faith institutions to adopt **safeguarding policies**, to enforce **zero tolerance** for under-age or coerced unions, and to ensure that **pastoral and premarital counselling** includes clear **referral mechanisms** to **Thuthuzela Care Centres** and shelters. Faith must be the conscience of a nation, not its alibi.

Looking ahead, we must embed prevention wherever boys become men—in schools, initiation pathways, youth ministries and sporting clubs—so that respect becomes the language of masculinity. And we must continue to build the **care economy**

as social and economic infrastructure—**recognising, reducing, redistributing and rewarding** care through budgets, workplaces and community services. When men share care, and when care is resourced and visible, women’s time, safety and income expand, and the cycle of dependency begins to break.

And, crucially, we must agree in this meeting that we will collectively **craft a single Programme of Action** — between the Department, **traditional leaders** and **faith-based organisations** — to align calendars and monitor results, so that our collective effort **delivers tangible change in communities**, not just commitments on paper and in conference rooms.

Section 4 — Conclusion and Call to Action

Programme Director,

As we close, let us remember why we came together today. We are not only discussing policy; we are renewing a **moral covenant** — that no woman, no girl, no person should ever have to negotiate their safety, their dignity, or their worth.

This is the generation that must make equality irreversible. We have the frameworks — from **CEDAW** to the **Maputo Protocol**, from our own **Constitution** to the **National Strategic Plan on GBVF** — but frameworks alone cannot shift a nation’s soul. It

takes leadership. It takes courage. It takes the daily, ordinary work of choosing care over cruelty, equality over ego, and justice over silence.

To our **Kings and Queens**, I thank you for leading with wisdom and heart. Your voices carry the moral weight of history — use them to protect, not to permit.

To our **faith leaders**, I ask that your pulpits become platforms for peace and partnership, not patriarchy.

To our **young people**, I say: you are not inheriting the world as it is; you are shaping the world as it should be.

And to every **man in this room**, I challenge you: let care be your mark of strength; let respect be your measure of power.

To our Strategic Partners the United Nations Resident Office, UN-Women, UNODC, UNFPA, the **AUDA-NEPAD** and many others; we sincerely appreciate our game-changing and nation impactful support. Thank for the extensive research in different areas of our mandate which enrich our knowledge products thus enabling empirically informed decisions.

As South Africa chairs the **G20 Empowerment of Women Working Group**, we carry this message of equality, dignity, empowerment and care to the global stage: that the work of transformation begins not in conference rooms, but in

communities — in how we treat one another, how we share responsibility, and how we teach the next generation to love differently.

If we can leave this dialogue resolved to live that truth — in our homes, our congregations, our schools and workplaces — then we will have done more than hold a meeting; we will have set a movement in motion.

This is how we move from **pledge to protection**, from **policy to practice**. Together—as government, traditional and faith leaders, civil society, and families—we can rebuild the moral centre of our nation and create a South Africa where **care is strength, equality is normal, and violence finds no permission**.

Distinguished guests, let this be remembered as the moment when South Africans, across generations and across faiths, stood together to say: **no more violence, no more silence, no more inequality — only care, only justice, only shared humanity**.

I thank you.