

**SPEECH BY HONOURABLE MINISTER IN THE
PRESIDENCY RESPONSIBLE FOR WOMEN, MS
BATHABILE DLAMINI, ON THE OCASSION OF THE
NATIONAL SANITARY DIGNITY LAUNCH**

Piet Retief Stadium, Mkhondo Local Municipality, Mpumalanga

28 February 2019

The Premier of Mpumalanga, Ms Refilwe Mtshweni

Members of the Executive Council

Executive Mayor Cllr Vusi Motha

District Mayor Cllr Muzi Chriwa

Speaker: Ms Thembelihle Nkosi

Members of Traditional Leadership

Development partners from the UN organisations

Young Women Leaders of tomorrow

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my pleasure to be part of this important day, the National Launch of the Sanitary Dignity Programme. I thank the Premier of Mpumalanga for agreeing to be part of this important partnership. It is a great pleasure to be at Mkhondo Local Municipality, an area that is rich in agriculture and forestry.

It is an area with a scenic landscape that captures the imagination of any traveller that drives past the town of Piet Retief, whether from Ermelo or from Pongola.

It is also a place that has a rich history of struggle against colonialism and apartheid, in particular the heroic struggle against forced removals because the white apartheid regime attempted to expropriate the few remaining rich lands occupied by blacks in the area.

Today marks a historical day and is a victory for young women of South Africa. South Africa and indeed Africa is in awe of the progress we have made in restoring the rights of young women.

The theme for the launch is **Restoring the Dignity of Young Women**. There is nothing this government treasures more than

the dignity of women and girls. This is enshrined in Chapter 10 of the Constitution under the Bill of rights wherein it declares that, **“everyone has inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected and protected”**.

This is a non-negotiable. The South African Government, as the government of the people, through The Department of Women has seen it appropriate to ensure that the dignity of the girl child is protected by rolling out free sanitary pads to learners that attend quintiles 1, 2 & 3 schools, which are no fee paying schools.

Government wants to ensure that these learners attend school without the constraints or hindrance due to a biological phenomenon which is a natural part of life.

Government further wants these learners to reach their fullest potential and compete with boy learners on an equal footing so that women can finally and maximally occupy boardrooms of companies, government institutions and other sectors of society and be part of building of a truly diverse and non-sexist society and be leaders in their own right.

Women are born into a life of oppression. Women are treated differently to men. As young girls, you are told that you must play inside, and you can only play with dolls. Young girls are expected to look after younger children, do the housework, cook and clean. Young girls are prepared for a life of servitude even before they can enjoy their childhood.

Young women are groomed for marriage and are measured by how many boys like them. Young girls struggle at tertiary institutions as they are treated as sex-objects, confined and controlled by young men who constantly exert their toxic masculinity onto women to remain dominant. Women are constantly expected to prove themselves in the workplace, while doing the same work as men, as well as running a home.

Women are abused, raped and murdered daily in this country. As a country, we have lost our moral compass, treating our women as objects to be used and discarded. The Department of Women intervenes in all these areas through policy interventions, lobbying for gender-responsive budgeting, planning, and auditing.

Very few countries in the world supply free sanitary pads to women and girls that cannot afford to access these products. South Africa is one of the leaders in this quest to ensure that women empowerment and gender equality is realised.

If sanitary pads are not made available to women and girls, that would have an impact in the academic progress of girl learners in particular at school while boys would progress without hindrance and that would perpetuate the prevailing feature of an unequal society.

Cabinet took a decision in October 2017 that the sanitary dignity programme should first be piloted in KwaZulu-Natal, Eastern Cape and Mpumalanga provinces and that would inform and guide the national rollout process.

The Department of Women applied for funding from National Treasury in order to fund the programme because this was never budgeted for in the past. This was done through the Medium Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) process. Subsequently National Treasury approved an allocation which was meant for an immediate rollout throughout the Provinces as from 2019/20 financial year.

This means that the programme would start from 01 April 2019. This national launch is meant to highlight that process and ensure a sense of keen awareness that learners in the quintiles mentored will not have to suffer the indignity of not being able to carry on with their normal lives due to menstruation.

The Department of Women has developed a national implementation framework that shall guide provinces in implementation because the framework sets out the values, norms and methodologies so that programme implementation is standardised and no province conducts itself differently from the other and most importantly, to ensure that the learner is able to receive the product on time and that there is a consistent distribution process.

Provinces will roll out the sanitary products because the budget has been allocated to them by National Treasury. DoW will monitor the implementation process and periodically report to Cabinet.

This process is only possible through partnership. There is a lot of collaboration that will be required between Department of

Women and some critical departments at National, Provincial and Local level because this programme is not just about giving access to these products but also to ensure that the infrastructure at schools is compatible with the aspect of dignity that has been raised already.

A typical example is that there needs to be collaboration with the National Department of Education to address school sanitation because there must be facilities that allow girls to change in an environment of privacy, that is, She-bins being available to throw away used products, as well as liquid soaps for washing, for hygienic purposes.

Menstrual Hygiene Management is also critical so that awareness can be instilled to learners in order for them to be keenly aware of their bodies and the changes therein, from puberty to mature age. Young girls are ridiculed and stigmatised when they go through their menstrual cycle. Cultural beliefs have created ideas of young girls being 'dirty' or engaging in sexual activity if they begin to menstruate. Girls are beginning to menstruate at a younger age and are being judged negatively for this natural phase in the development of a girl's body. This psychological trauma stays with a young girl through

her teenage years and can affect a young woman for the rest of her life.

Life skills training must ensure that these issues are factored into the curriculum and that the Educators are well knowledgeable with the subject matter.

Further, collaboration with the Department of Water and Sanitation and the Water Research Commission is paramount and that would assist in efforts to ensure that there is water and sanitation at schools, especially rural and township schools.

The Department of Environmental Affairs and Municipalities would also assist in matters related to waste management. This is an example to demonstrate that Department of Women and Provinces cannot do this alone; it should be an integrated governmental effort across the three spheres.

There is a very important matter of the economic value chain of the sanitary dignity programme, that is, the local economic development aspect wherein women owned and run manufacturing enterprises can be encouraged, as well as

women owned cooperatives to occupy the space. This is already taking place in Gauteng, KwaZulu-Natal, Free State and Western Cape. There are opportunities in manufacturing, storage, distribution and waste management.

Department of Women is collaborating with the Department of Trade and Industry and Department of Department of Small Business Development on how to advise and assist aspirant or existing small medium manufacturers so that they can grow and eventually dominate the mainstream. Women-led and Women-owned co-operatives are essential in becoming part of the value chain in supplying these products to government.

As we proceed The Department of Women shall move beyond rolling out sanitary products to quintiles 1, 2, and 3 schools and extend the programme to the following categories of indigents:

- i) Women in Public Tertiary Institutions;
- ii) Women in Correctional Service Centres;
- iii) Women in Places of Safety; and
- iv) Women in Communities that would be identified through indigent lists and other means.

These are efforts to ensure that women's menstrual hygiene matters are taken seriously and that their sexual reproductive and health right issues are at the top of the national agenda. National Treasury would have to be made aware that sanitary dignity is an essential and necessary part of a progressive ethos of creating a gender responsive and planning budgeting process whose resultant objective is achieving women's empowerment and gender equality.

In the next few months, the Department of Women is attending the Commission on the Status of Women at the United States headquarters in New York to give an account of what South Africa is doing in the name of empowerment of women and this initiative will form part of that report. South Africa will present on the care-economy, a part of the economy where women are expected to care for elders and families without compensation. As The Department of Women, we are saying that this care-work must form part of the GDP of the country so that we can truly understand the contribution women make to the economy of this country.

In conclusion, I would like to encourage learners present here to work hard in their studies in order to achieve in life and get out of the generational poverty trap, to achieve and be part of

building a society where women leadership is a norm, rather than an exception and that they will contribute in the building of human capital in this country.

I wish you success in all your undertakings and I hope that in my lifetime, a Woman President will emerge from your ranks.

To the learners, please stay away from unhelpful distractions like teenage pregnancy, drugs, alcohol and the dangerously creeping sugar daddy and blesser phenomenon in our society. Refuse to allow poverty or difficult circumstances in your lives to cloud your positive judgement, for your sake and the sake of the country.

This government cares about you unconditionally and will ensure that you achieve your goals in life. Look forward to a post-matric academic life wherein you shall receive free education once you reach tertiary level. Use the opportunities open for you which were non-existent in the recent past. As we roll out sanitary pads to all learners in the quintiles mentioned, the Department of Women will ensure that monitoring and evaluation of the programme is done.

As we go towards national election, I ask you to go to the Department of Home Affairs and fetch your IDs so that you can be allowed to vote. I'm certain that Vusumuzi Saul Mkhize would be looking down at us with proud to know that people of Mpumalanga in general and those of Mkhondo in particular still have a sense of rich struggle history and continue to flock to the polls in order to protect their future and that of their children because we are the guarantors of our collective destiny.

I urge the private and civil sector to continue working with government; together we will surely lead a South Africa where women are free of all forms of discrimination. Your efforts will go down in history books as momentous steps towards the transformation of women's lives in our country.

I thank you.