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## **SPEAKING NOTES FOR MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES**

### **PUBLIC DEBATE ON WOMEN'S ECONOMIC POWERLESSNESS AS A FORM OF GENDER BASED VIOLENCE**

Thank you for the opportunity provided to address this engagement.  
Thank you to the panel members for availing their time for this discussion.

I address this engagement unsure of how much more damage COVID-19 has had, or unable to predict its far reaching effects with certainty. Furthermore, I am unsure whether the most vulnerable being women, youth and persons with disabilities have equitably benefited from social and economic relief measures offered during the past 6 months.

For the benefit of our audience, allow me to outline the role of The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities. The Department's mandate is to ensure that women, youth and persons with disabilities are placed at the centre of development programmes. Our response to inequality is premised on the basis that inclusive programmes, which are geared towards rectifying gender imbalances of the past, closing gaps in the representation of women, youth and persons with disabilities, and breaking through stereotypes and misogynistic agendas will dismantle structural drivers of inequality, and break heteronormative and patriarchal systems that benefit conformity and a select group of privileged individuals.

For the first time, 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. We continue to advocate for the same in the post COVID Economic Recovery Plans.

The COVID-19 global pandemic has brought all forms of inequalities, particularly gendered inequalities. As South Africans have continued to grapple with how to respond to the intersecting social, health, economic, and climate crises of this era, we recognize the importance of ensuring that historical, and existing oppressions and vulnerabilities are not further entrenched. Central to this task is ensuring that all relief measures do not serve to further entrench women's positions of powerlessness. It is thus critical to look back and have a frank discussion that aims to understand whether women or women owned enterprises benefited from the economic relief measures.

Government has made various efforts to cushion the impact of the lockdown on businesses, but for many women owned enterprises, which dominantly operate in the informal sector, they have not at all benefited from the relief programmes.

An effective and sustainable response to Gender Based Violence (GBV) in South Africa depends on a fundamental shift in economic power dynamics that have an adverse impact on women in particular.

Equally important is an understanding of GBV in South Africa and the recognition of the inherent economic abuse, as defined in the Domestic Violence Act 116 of 1998 that is a central component exercised in the control over women's bodies, within intimate relationships, and in broader societal systems such as the economy.

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.

We must encourage complete and unfettered access to financial and non-financial opportunities for our people, restructuring of our socio-economic systems to effectively meet these needs within their lifetimes through developing integrated approaches that are unapologetic with regards to achieving these outcomes in any meaningful way – by placing our people first. A call is made for an integrated approach towards supporting the economic empowerment of women, youth and persons with disabilities. This is not for DWYPD but it is every department's business to make a contribution, as this would have greater developmental benefits for the country as a whole.

Heeding to these calls South Africa has joined Generation Equality, a global campaign to achieve gender equality by 2030. As part of this

campaign, we are part of two Action Coalitions, one on economic justice and rights and another on gender-based violence and femicide. These Action Coalitions mobilise governments, civil society and the private sector for collective action. They give us an opportunity to work with leaders to achieve real change in the lives of women. The country has increased the number of shelters and care centres for survivors and improved the capacity of our police to deal with crimes of gender-based violence. One of the most important ways to reduce the vulnerability of women to gender-based violence is to enable them to become financially independent. With the launch of Generation Equality and with the implementation of the National Strategic Plan the country has a unique opportunity to refashion its society and the lives of the women of South Africa.

The current shape and form of our society and its economic structure must change to better deliver on the promises of equitable wealth redistribution, with a complementary system that effectively and proactively responds to the aspirations of our people should become what we know as the new-norm. Our people more than ever must become progressively self-sufficient, we must therefore industrialise to grow current and new nodal points for our township and rural economies, firmly placing women at the centre of the country's national developmental agenda. Women's rights to dignity, security, safety and protection is non-negotiable. A country seeking growth such as ourselves to ensure that it brings on board the collective potential of our women in a technically sound structurally and collaborative manner must take bold and measurable actions.

Government, civil society and the private sector are all actors for meaningful change, without this collaboration, this change will remain stagnant.

Our government sees public procurement as a critical pillar to give Small, Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) a new life. The expansion of women's access to economic opportunities will go a long way in doing this as we work towards ensuring that 40% of public procurement spend goes to women-owned businesses. It is imperative that national departments monitor and report on how many women have participated in each public procurement processes and development programmes.

To ensure that all state organs make a contribution towards gender equality, the following principles should be adopted:

- Ensuring that economic recovery plans, strategies and interventions for the respective industries are explicit in terms of the representation of women, youth and persons with disabilities.
- Targets are set per industry and sectoral master plans for women's economic empowerment in order to adequately respond to inclusive economic participation, ownership, access to resources and wage equality.

State owned enterprises and the private sector are key stakeholders in driving transformation and gender equality. Their contribution towards economic empowerment and participation, targeted enterprise and entrepreneurship development interventions for

WYPD would further enhance government's efforts of fast-tracking implementable targets that are industry specific.

As various economic relief measures were being rolled out in response to COVID-19, it should have been critically noted that the marginalisation of disadvantaged groups only weakens our country's resilience. Therefore, our efforts going forward should enable the pulling of people from the periphery rather than hoping for their inclusion. We endeavour to be a society where each individual has the agency for self-actualisation.

I THANK YOU!