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**SPEAKING NOTES DELIVERED BY DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF  
DEPARTMENT OF WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH  
DISABILITIES, ADVOCATE MIKATEKO JOYCE MALULEKE ON  
BEHALF OF MINISTER MAITE NKOANA-MASHABANE**

**CAPACITY BUILDING WORKSHOP ON OPPORTUNITIES WITHIN THE  
SANITARY DIGNITY PROGRAMME ECONOMIC VALUE CHAIN**

Allow me to recognise the Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Maite Nkoana-Mashabane in absentia.

Allow me to also recognise Deputy Minister in the Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Professor Hlengiwe Mkhize, who is on the road in the Free State as part of Disability Rights Awareness Month Activities.

Programme Director, Fellow Panelists, guests attending this important webinar.

Thank you for the opportunity provided to address our fellow government officials, the public, civil society and private sector, this afternoon.

I address this engagement in a time where the rights of women and girls are continuously being violated. The dignity of women and girls is constantly under threat. Thus, the struggle for the dignity and equal

rights of women is a global struggle of our generation. The President has declared the outbreak of Gender Based Violence in the country as a second pandemic, following the Covid-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has not only taken the lives of so many loved ones, but has also laid bare the inequalities that exists between the vulnerable and the privileged in society.

According to the South African Human Rights Commission 2017 report, the right to equality in the Bill of Rights is the most violated one in South Africa. The right states that everyone is equal and must be treated equally, regardless of their race, gender, sex, marital status, religion, etc.

Another crucial human right is that of human dignity, which states that “everyone has an inherent dignity and the right to have their dignity respected.”

This week we launch Disability Rights Awareness Month, which also looks at eradicating inequality in all its forms by building inclusive communities. As we undertake this webinar we must not forget that women with disabilities face compounded marginalisation and so we should look at ways of including women with disabilities into value chains as well.

In 1996, former President Nelson Mandela stated that as long as women are bound by poverty and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance. Although South Africa has since made significant progress of improving the plight of women, many

challenges still exist. Women's economic participation remains limited to some industries and selected employment levels.

In 2017, the former Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women, Minister Susan Shabangu, mentioned that the current health system of South Africa provides free access to contraceptives and health services for sexually transmitted diseases. She emphasised that what remains is the provision of sanitary towels for the indigent girl child. For most indigent women, menstruation is often a rather inconvenient biological reality against which there is no control and which is expensive for most ordinary women.

It affects girls and women differently and in many instances it has a negative impact on their psychological state of health. The ability to manage menstruation with adequate dignity is essential to the human rights of women and girls.

The Constitutional Court described the right to dignity and the right to life as the most important human rights. The Court expressed the view that the right to dignity is the acknowledgement of the intrinsic worth of a human being.

In order to give effect to these constitutional principles, it is imperative that government advance and promote women's rights to dignity. This was confirmed by former President of the Republic of South Africa Mr Jacob Zuma in his State of the Nation Address of February 2011 where he stated as follows:

*Given our emphasis on women's health, we will broaden the scope of reproductive health rights and provide services related to amongst others, contraception, sexually transmitted infections, teenage pregnancy and sanitary towels for the indigent.*

In order to preserve a women's dignity during menstruation it is important that such women have access to adequate sanitary products and other requirements to achieve sanitary dignity. The lack of access to such products may for example lead to absenteeism from schools and the work place.

It may also affect an indigent person's health and well-being. Their rights may be compromised in the sense that it may be difficult for them to fully participate in daily activities such as sport and cultural events, political and community activities, resulting into unequal societies.

We can also discuss the cultural and social stigmas attached to menstruating women within communities and how lack of access to products to manage their cycle further impacts on trauma faced by women.

It was in this context that the DWYPD as the custodian of the promotion and advancement of gender equality and empowerment of women, decided to develop the Sanitary Dignity Implementation Framework (SDIF), which was approved by cabinet in September 2019. The aim of this Framework is to promote sanitary dignity and to provide norms and standards in respect of the provision of sanitary products to indigent persons. It furthermore seeks to promote the addressing of girls and

women rights including the rights of persons with disabilities; social justice and emphasises the basic human rights of indigent persons.

One of the objectives of the framework is “to broaden economic participation in the sanitary dignity value chain to include the empowerment of women, youth and persons with disabilities;”. In alignment with this objective, the DWYPD envisages the economic participation of women and girls across the economic value chain of the SDP, instead of only being recipients of sanitary products, but they are key economic players. Opportunities that exist within the SDP economic value chain include those within manufacturing, storage, packaging, transport and distribution and waste disposal and management.

The DWYPD has in the recent past worked with the Department of Trade, Industry and Competition, the South African Bureau of Standards, Department of Small Business Development, UNWomen and United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA) to implement interventions that support the empowerment and participation of women, youth and persons with disabilities in the SDP. Through these initiatives, some women have been trained on the Standards for sanitary pads, supported with product testing and gap analysis.

An acceleration of such initiatives and interventions is necessary. The implementation of local economic empowerment programmes, in partnership with local authorities, private sector, civil society and communities would have a far more reaching impact in under resourced areas such as townships and rural areas, where despite the enactment of an enabling legislative and policy environment and institutional

support there has been inadequate development of sustainable SMMEs and Cooperatives owned and managed by women, youth and persons with disabilities.

We must encourage complete and unfettered access to financial and non-financial opportunities for our people, restructure 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.

Thank you

