

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

**MESSAGE OF SUPPORT AT THE
NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY COMMEMORATION
HOSTED BY THE PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
SOL PLAATJE UNIVERSITY, KIMBERLEY, NORTHERN CAPE
2026**

**THEME: “70 YEARS OF RESISTANCE, 72 YEARS OF VISION –
ADVANCING GENDER JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND RESILIENT
ECONOMIES FOR ALL”**

PART A: SALUTATIONS

Igama lamakhosikazi! Malibongwe!

- Programme Director;
- Ms Angela Thokozile Didiza, MP, Speaker of the National Assembly;
- Dr Zamani Saul, Premier of the Northern Cape;
- Ms Newrene Claudine Klaaste, MPL, Speaker of the Northern Cape Provincial Legislature;
- Ms Thandi Ruth Modise, veteran of our liberation struggle;
- Ms Sylvia Elizabeth Izaks, MP, Chairperson of the Joint Standing Committee on Intelligence, National Assembly;
- Ms Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Chairperson of the Beijing +30 African Women's Movement;
- Honourable Members of Parliament and of the Provincial Legislature;
- The Vice-Chancellor, leadership and students of Sol Plaatje University;
- Leaders of our traditional and religious institutions;

Good morning.

I am honoured to bring a message of support on behalf of the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities – and on behalf of the women of South Africa who are not in this hall today, but whose lives are the subject of everything we have assembled for.

PART B: WE HAVE EVERY REASON TO CELEBRATE

Programme Director, let me begin where we should always begin – with what organised women have already won.

Seventy years ago, when the women who came before us marched on the Union Buildings, women's lived realities were a far cry from where we are today. They had no vote. They had no standing in law. Many of them could not open a bank account without a man's signature. Yet, despite this level of dehumanisation, they had a vision which is now 72 years old

Two years before that march, in 1954, the women of this country adopted the historic Women's Charter. That is where the seventy-two years of vision in our theme begins. Long before there was a Constitution to protect them, women wrote down what a free South Africa would have to look like – **equality before the law, equal pay, the right to own property, paid maternity leave, childcare, and an end to the laws that made a woman a permanent minor.**

Today, a woman is no longer a minor in law. A woman may own land in her own name, inherit from her father, and remain in her home after her husband dies. Women make up 43,5% of our National Assembly, up from 28% in 1994. Forty-five percent of our judges are women, up from two women in 1994, and a South African woman has served as Chief Justice of this Republic. More than sixty percent of our university graduates are women. Since 1994, nearly 3,4 million housing subsidies have been approved, and fifty-eight percent of them went to women.

Everyone of these victories was fought for by women whose names may never reach the spotlight.

So we have every reason to celebrate. Let us celebrate the domestic worker who is now protected by law. The farm worker who now has a minimum wage. The girl in Galeshewe who will finish matric this year, in a country where in 1996 fewer than sixteen percent of women had done so. And let us celebrate that this commemoration is hosted at a university carrying the name of Sol Plaatje, in a province where a young woman can now study astronomy and work at the largest radio telescope on earth for free through the National Students Financial Aid Scheme.

PART C: THE BARRIERS THAT REMAIN

Honourable Members, **despite the significant achievements we have registered, we remain far from where we wish to be.**

Seventy years later, women continue to navigate a complex landscape of intersecting oppressions rooted in colonial legacies, neo-colonial extraction, patriarchal structures, and global economic injustice.

Colonialism imposed foreign legal systems that codified women's subordination. It destroyed indigenous governance structures in which women held power. It introduced doctrines that justified patriarchal control over women in every sphere of life. At some point in our history we were considered somebody's property. That is no longer the case in law. But women's relationship to land, property and related productive assets still demands our urgent attention — **because the law changed and the ownership did not.**

The structural adjustment programmes of the 1980s and 1990s, imposed on this continent, devastated African economies, gutted public services, and pushed millions of African women into informal work, unpaid care and precarious livelihoods.

Our approach to building resilient economies cannot ignore the disproportionate burden women continue to carry on behalf of everyone. When a clinic closes, a woman nurses the sick at home. When a creche closes, a woman stays home. The legacy of those decisions is still carried on the backs of African women, and

reversing it will take deliberate law , deliberate policy and most of all, deliberate action.

That is why our Department is developing a care economy strategy for South Africa — **so that the work which holds this country together is counted, supported and paid.**

Honourable Members, without these deliberate actions, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, well-intentioned as it is, will continue to be implemented through frameworks that leave women behind. Afterall, with four years remaining, not one of the gender equality targets is on track to be met.

PART D: ADVANCING GENDER JUSTICE, EQUALITY AND RESILIENT ECONOMIES

Programme Director, our theme asks us to advance gender justice, equality and resilient economies for all. Allow me to speak to three things we must now prioritise.

First: land, property and productive assets

Honourable Members, to build resilient economies and keep the vision of the Women's Charter alive, we must be relentless when it comes to transferring land, property and productive assets into the hands of women. The laws are in place. What we must now accelerate is funded reform programmes.

We know too well that, for African women, **land is not merely property. It is identity, heritage, spirituality, livelihood, and wealth passed between generations.** Yet systematic dispossession continues. Women make up the majority of Africa's agricultural workforce but own only a small fraction of its agricultural land. Customary tenure systems recognise a woman's right to use land while systematically excluding her from owning it, controlling it, or passing it on to her children.

Securing women's rights to productive assets is thus no longer an option. It is the precondition for everything else we say we want.

Second: structured and sustained mentorship

Honourable Members, in order to keep the vision alive we need mentorship programmes for young women from all walks of life — intentional, structured and sustained. Not a single career day. Mentorship that places a young woman inside the room she is meant one day to lead, and intergenerational dialogue that then informs policy and practice.

In mining, we need young women mentored across the entire value chain. But a woman's place in mining cannot end at the mine gate. Our government is working hard to place young women in geology and exploration, in mine engineering and rock mechanics, in processing and beneficiation, in mine

rehabilitation, and in the boardrooms where decisions are made and power is exercised.

We need to see a young woman from this province who begins as a mining engineering student at a university, spends her holidays shadowing an operations manager on an iron ore mine, and returns fifteen years later to run the very mine. We need mentorship that takes the form of a deliberate pipeline to nurturing tomorrow's talent.

In logistics, we are calling for young women to be mentored in the movement of goods across the SADC region. Mentorship in this area will ensure that our ports, our rail corridors and our border posts are run by systems designed by and with women in mind, and staffed accordingly.

In energy security, we need young women across the nuclear and hydro value chains – the sub-sectors most readily left to men. And here the Northern Cape is no bystander. This province carries the largest concentration of solar and wind generation in South Africa. The young women of Upington, De Aar and Springbok should not be watching that industry from the roadside.

And in Parliament, we need mentorship programmes for young lawmakers – the future Members who will write the laws of this

country, and correct where we fall short. Honourable Speaker, this is a programme that this House can begin itself.

Third: the ocean

Programme Director, we cannot build resilient economies whilst paying minimal attention to the ocean.

For centuries the ocean has been the backbone of global and regional trade. Despite the rise of air transport and overland routes, the overwhelming majority of world trade is still carried by sea.

Scholars have called our territorial waters South Africa's tenth province, given the economic potential that lies in them.

And yet the sector remains largely untapped, untransformed and male-dominated. At the first Maritime Skills Summit we learnt that 71,5% of everyone employed in the sector is male, and that 54% of them are between thirty-five and fifty-five years old. We learnt of persistent disparities in ownership and control, particularly among large and medium-scale enterprises. This will have to change. Black women will not merely take centre stage in this sector — they will have to be prioritised.

In accordance with our mandate, we are dedicating a significant part of this Jubilee Year to shining a critical spotlight on the historic and ongoing cultural, structural and occupational barriers that render the maritime environment unattractive and

inaccessible to South African women. Far-reaching change is needed — not only within the maritime sector, but within society as a whole — to create the conditions in which women can participate meaningfully across every value chain in the ocean economy.

A maritime skills revolution

Honourable Members, whether the abundance of the ocean becomes a blessing or a curse will be determined by the extent to which we deliberately skill our people, and young women in particular.

Fisheries and aquaculture, offshore oil and gas, marine biotechnology, coastal and marine tourism — none of these will serve us if the skills that unlock them sit outside our borders. We cannot repeat the pattern this continent knows too well, where the discovery of a resource brings exploitation and sometimes violence, and leaves the people living above that resource poorer than they were before.

Skills development and women's empowerment must be built into the planning, the implementation, and the monitoring and evaluation of how we industrialise and benefit the resources of our oceans — not added afterwards. To break the cycle of a rich Africa with poor Africans, we need a sector-specific skills

revolution that meets the current and future needs of this economy.

CLOSING

Honourable Speaker, seventy years later, we have come a long way. The road ahead remains long and challenging. However, none of it is insurmountable.

Our task is smaller than theirs. The laws are written. The doors of learning and culture are largely open. What remains is to walk our daughters through them — into the mines, into the ports, into the courts, and into this House — and to stay there until it is ordinary.

I thank you.

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