

**MINISTRY IN THE PRESIDENCY
FOR WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

CLOSING REMARKS, CALL TO ACTION AND VOTE OF THANKS BY

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

PORTRAITS OF POWER — EXHIBITION LAUNCH

Convened by the Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke Institute (CMMI)

in partnership with The Presidency

“If you can rise, bring someone with you”

— Charlotte Mannya Maxeke

Union Buildings, Pretoria | 4 August 2026

- Programme Director, Ms Karabo Mohale;
- Hon. Minister Khumbudzo Ntshavheni;
- Hon. Minister Thembu Simelane;
- Hon. Deputy Minister Peace Mabe;
- Chairperson of the Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke Institute, Mr Thulasizwe Makhanya;
- Ms Kimberly Nkuku of the CMMI;
- Ms Lenore Goss-Matjie of the South African State Theatre;
- Ms Khonzi Zondi and Dr Zanele Matsane of the Charlotte Maxeke Education Fund;
- Curator Ms Palesa Suthane;
- Excellencies, Ambassadors and Heads of Mission; Distinguished Guests;
- Ladies and Gentlemen,

Programme Director, allow me to begin by congratulating the **Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke Institute** on the successful launch of **Portraits of Power** - a landmark exhibition, in partnership with The Presidency, that honours twenty exceptional women from South Africa and across the world whose leadership has transformed nations and inspired generations. Today marks a moment of great pride for all who have come to understand that the story of our nation is inseparable from the story of the women who built it.

We thank the foundation for being **deliberate in documenting our history and heritage with dignity**, and for doing so at the **Union Buildings** — in this historic year, under the fitting national theme of *“Empowered Women, Empower Nations”*.

We thank the foundation and its partners for **occupying a space that has for far too long been left unoccupied**. It has been disheartening to witness the **dangerous vacuum** in how our history has been documented and often misrepresented. For far too long, we have outsourced this space, and we are paying a hefty price for it. The **media and creative space is not only central to the battle of ideas — it carries the very soul of a nation**. **Portraits of Power** is therefore a timely and transformative effort in honouring, and in preserving, the legacy of our founding mothers.

Maxeke and her generation understood that **when you surrender knowledge production and dissemination to the elites, what is considered good becomes that which sustains the oppressor’s dominant position — and everything about the oppressed is presented as undesirable**. That is why, too many times, our universities end up producing graduates who want to be everything else but African. Some of them seem ashamed of their identity — and too many times we long to be those things most unlike ourselves.

We therefore thank the Foundation for **elevating the name of Maxeke - an under-celebrated shining example of African women's unlimited potential to excel in every sphere of life.**

For academics in the room, we need a curriculum that **does not act as a rationale for dividing Africans and plundering our wealth-producing resources.** We need a curriculum that acts as the undercurrent of a sovereign people — with **unity as the foundation for that sovereignty.**

A Call to Action — Commitments We Must Make Today

Programme Director, we must leave here with a call to action.

First, **let Africa and the world move from merely remembering women to building institutions that include women.** Our responsibility is not only to honour the women who changed history — it is to ensure that the next generation of women have **the power to define their own futures.** A portrait on a wall is a beginning, not a destination.

Second, **women must take their rightful place in all areas where decisions are made and power is exercised.** Especially decisions over the ownership, control and management of the wealth producing resources of this land. We must continue to ask difficult questions: Where are the women **when budgets are allocated, when policies are designed, and when decisions**

about our collective future are taken? Women's participation must be **institutionalised**, not incidental.

Third, **access must be non-negotiable**. We must connect our young women to **education, financial support, networks, and institutions** that can turn ambition into influence — and influence into impact.

Fourth, **we must make intergenerational inclusion mandatory**. This initiative already creates a platform connecting international women leaders, diplomats, artists, students, and young women leaders. Let us **institutionalise those connections**. Every woman who has climbed the ladder must become part of **building the ladder for someone else**. Bring someone along.

Fifth, **we must build bridges for women to access all sectors of the economy**. The women whose portraits we unveil today should not remain historical figures on walls. They must become **symbols of hope, and of access**. Their stories must enter our classrooms, our universities, our communities, and our conversations with young women — and opportunities must be **materially realised in their honour**.

Sixth, **we must demand institutional commitment, not symbolic commitment**. The true measure of our commitment to women is not the number of conferences we hold, or portraits we

unveil. It is whether our **institutions themselves change** — whether women gain **access to capital, education, leadership, technology, markets, and decision-making power.**

And seventh, **let us leave this room with a personal responsibility.** Leave here committed. Identify **one young woman you will mentor. One door you will open. One institution you will challenge. One opportunity you will create.** Because the most powerful portrait we can unveil is **the portrait of the woman whose future we helped change.**

A Vote of Thanks

Programme Director, allow me to close by extending our gratitude to every hand that made today possible.

Thank you to **Programme Director Ms Karabo Mohale** for guiding us through today's proceedings with grace and precision. Thank you to the **Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke Institute**, to Chairperson **Mr Thulasizwe Makhanya**, and to **Ms Kimberly Nkuku** for the vision, and for the institutional labour, that has brought Portraits of Power to life. Thank you to **The Presidency** for partnering with the CMMI in hosting this exhibition here at the Union Buildings, and to **Hon. Minister Khumbudzo Ntshavheni** for the keynote address that anchored today's substantive reflection.

Thank you to **Hon. Minister Thembi Simelane** for the Exhibition Overview; to **Hon. Deputy Minister Peace Mabe** and the

Department of Sport, Arts and Culture; to Ms Lenore Goss-Matjie and the South African State Theatre; and to Ms Khonzi Zondi and Dr Zanele Matsane of the Charlotte Maxeke Education Fund — for reminding us that this exhibition is a shared undertaking of arts, culture, education, and the State.

Thank you to our **Curator, Ms Palesa Suthane**, whose artistic sensibility carried us through the story of each of the twenty women; and to the **Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Embassy representatives** of every one of the fifteen participating countries.

And finally, thank you to the **women whose portraits now hang on these walls**. You did not ask to be remembered. You simply refused to be forgotten. Today, on behalf of a grateful nation, and of an inspired continent, we say: **we know you, we honour you, we rise with you, and we commit to becoming you**.

If we can rise, we must bring someone with us — that is the assignment Charlotte Maxeke left for every one of us.

I thank you.