

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

**ADDRESS BY
MINISTER SINDISIWE CHIKUNGA, MP**

**AT THE
PUBLIC LEADERSHIP FOR GENDER EQUALITY WORKSHOP**

**VIVARI HOTEL, SOUTH AFRICA
21 APRIL 2026**

Programme Director.

Representatives of the Global Centre for Gender Equality.

Representatives of the Gates Foundation.

Senior government officials.

Distinguished guests.

Good morning.

My name is Sindisiwe Chikunga, and I have the honour of serving South Africans as the Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women, Youth, and Persons with Disabilities. I am here with my colleagues, and I wish to thank the Global Center for Gender Equality for this invitation and for

your growing partnership with the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities.

SECTION ONE: A HISTORIC YEAR — THE GROUND ON WHICH THIS WORKSHOP STANDS

Programme Director,

I wish to begin by foregrounding this workshop in its proper historical context.

This year, 2026, marks seventy years since twenty thousand women — mothers, grandmothers, factory workers, domestic workers, teachers, and nurses — marched to the Union Buildings on the 9th of August 1956. This year marks a platinum jubilee since Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Sophie de Bruyn — and the thousands whose names history never recorded — took a stand against patriarchy and racism at a time when doing so placed your life on the line. These are the women on whose shoulders we stand today.

This year also marks fifty years since the 1976 Youth Uprising, when young women and men of this country changed the course of history. Their courage is part of the same unbroken thread that connects 1956 to 1976 to the women who shaped our Constitution thirty years ago.

2026 also marks thirty years since the adoption of our Constitution and Bill of Rights — especially the commitment to the full and equal participation of women in economic, political, and social life.

Three milestones. Three generations. One unfinished struggle.

I foreground these milestones because they are instructive. Each of them teaches us something about the relationship between leadership and gender equality. In 1956, it was ordinary women — not politicians, not officials — who led. In 1976, it was young people who refused to accept a system that had been normalised by those in power. And in 1996, it was a generation of constitutional architects who understood that equality must be written into the DNA of the state, not left to the goodwill of individual leaders.

We meet at a time when South Africa is called upon to deepen the meaning of democracy — **not only through what we say, but through what we deliver.** Gender equality is not a side issue. It is not a ceremonial matter. It is a constitutional obligation, a developmental imperative, and a test of whether the democratic state is working for all its people.

Our Constitution is clear. South Africa is founded on human dignity, the achievement of equality, the advancement of human rights and freedoms, non-racialism, and non-sexism. The Bill of Rights binds the state to respect, protect, promote, and fulfil these rights. Gender equality is not optional for public institutions. It is part of the core business of the state.

This programme is therefore both timely and necessary. It gives public leaders a practical opportunity to reflect on what gender-transformative change means in the South African public sector — and how leadership practices such as working with purpose, navigating power, and building partnerships can influence real change through everyday decisions and actions.

We wish to be clear about the standard we are setting for this engagement. We want participants to leave this workshop with the tools, the frameworks, and the leadership practices that will enable them to go back to their departments and do something different on Wednesday morning. The test of this programme is not what happens in this room. The test is what happens when you return to your desks.

SECTION TWO: OUR MANDATE — A CONTINUATION OF THE 1956 MANDATE

Programme Director,

Our department's mandate is inextricably linked to the struggle of the women who came before us. We are mandated to promote and mainstream the socio-economic empowerment and participation of women, youth, and persons with disabilities through advocacy, monitoring, evaluation, and mainstreaming.

Central to this mandate is our government's commitment, in line with the National Development Plan, to transform, empower, and transition vulnerable groups into catalysts for socio-economic change and impact. We occupy a space informed by our government's realisation that, despite the presence of other departments and their programmes, vulnerable groups require a catalyst to take extraordinary measures and ensure they are not left behind.

We take our mandate seriously. It is with this mandate in mind that we threw our full support behind the objectives of the **Global Centre for Gender Equality's Public Leadership for Gender Equality Program** and its commitment to creating a society that is free from gender inequality and intersectional forms of subordination and oppression.

SECTION THREE: THE GLOBAL CENTER FOR GENDER EQUALITY — WHY THIS PARTNERSHIP MATTERS

Programme Director,

The Global Centre for Gender Equality brings valuable experience in supporting institutions to move beyond commitments toward measurable and sustained change. Its work as a trusted technical partner — including in large-scale gender integration efforts with global institutions such as the Gates Foundation — positions it uniquely to support governments in translating ambition into implementation. We are particularly grateful for the support of the Gates Foundation in bringing the expertise of the Center and this workshop to South Africa, and in walking this journey with us.

The six leadership practices that underpin this programme — the **Six Ps** — provide a clear and actionable framework. They help leaders to ground their work in purpose, to use data more effectively, to strengthen accountability, and to collaborate across institutional boundaries. They emphasise adaptability and, importantly, personal commitment.

Equally important is the focus on building capacity across the public service. Many leaders have not had the opportunity to develop the skills and approaches needed to integrate gender into areas such as budgeting, infrastructure, or economic policy. This programme begins to close that

gap. But beyond skills, it builds something even more powerful: **a community of leaders who are equipped, connected, and committed to driving change within their institutions.**

The fact that PL4GE was incubated at Stanford University, developed by the Global Center for Gender Equality, and supported by the Gates Foundation gives it global credibility. But what gives it South African legitimacy is the process that brought us here — the contextualisation, the case studies drawn from our own sectors, the integration of the DWYPD’s own tools and frameworks, and the presence of South African leaders whose individual experiences are showcased throughout the curriculum.

SECTION FOUR: THE SHEER SCALE OF THE CHALLENGE BEFORE US

Programme Director,

The UN Secretary-General has reminded the world that:

“Everywhere, women are worse off than men, simply because they are women. Inequality and discrimination are the norm. Violence against women, including femicide, is at epidemic levels.”

South Africa is no exception. Shortly after we agreed to champion this programme, we received the South African National Gender-Based

Violence Prevalence Study, conducted by the Human Sciences Research Council. The findings are devastating.

33.1% of all women have experienced physical violence in their lifetime. 7.9% of ever-partnered women have experienced sexual violence by a partner. 27% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence by a non-partner since the age of 15. And 20.5% of ever-partnered men admitted to perpetrating physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence.

With regard to persons with disabilities, the HSRC study found that the prevalence of sexual violence by a lifetime partner is **twice as high** for women with disabilities compared to those without — 14.6% against 7.2%. This means heinous crimes are being committed against women who can neither hear, see, nor talk — and for these women, justice is almost always denied.

These are not distant abstractions. Behind every percentage point are women with names, with families, with aspirations that have been shattered by violence. They are the women who walk into our government offices seeking help. They are the women whose cases are processed — or not processed — by the law enforcement. They are the women whose dignity depends on whether our public institutions are led by people who

understand that gender equality is not a compliance exercise, but a matter of life and death.

South Africa has made strong and clear commitments through the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide. We have aligned ourselves with global frameworks, including the Sustainable Development Goals. And our President has consistently affirmed gender equality as a national priority — most decisively through the classification of GBVF as a national crisis.

But the distance between commitment and impact remains too wide. And that distance is shaped, more than anything else, by leadership.

Public leadership determines whether policies remain words on paper or become real change in people's lives. It shapes how budgets are allocated, how services are delivered, and how accountability is enforced. Yet we must also acknowledge that public leaders operate in complex environments. There are competing priorities, constrained resources, and deeply embedded institutional cultures that can make gender equality feel like an add-on rather than a core responsibility. What is required, therefore, is not only technical capacity — but leadership courage.

Let me say what leadership courage looks like in practice. It looks like a Director-General who insists that every budget submission in her department is accompanied by a gender impact assessment. It looks like a provincial head of department who refuses to sign off on an infrastructure programme that has not considered the safety and accessibility needs of women and girls with disabilities. It looks like a municipal manager who ensures that community consultations do not only happen in boardrooms during working hours — but in spaces and at times where the women who are most affected can actually participate.

That is the kind of leadership this programme is designed to cultivate. Not leadership as rhetoric. Leadership as daily practice.

SECTION FIVE: WHY WE SUPPORT THIS PROGRAMME — FIVE REASONS

Programme Director,

As we indicated during our workshop held on the 14th of February 2025, we see our participation in this programme as part of our gender mainstreaming function — a process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programmes, in all areas and at all levels.

First, for us, gender equality and women's empowerment are fundamentally about the empowerment of society as a whole. No nation of consequence has made any real progress while maintaining backward gender hierarchies. Patriarchy and the resultant gender inequality have had a profoundly detrimental effect on women and society as a whole — hindering the utilisation of humanity's collective intelligence and talent in confronting some of the most pressing developmental challenges we face today. From climate change and hunger to pandemics and the digital divide, we have all been found wanting.

Second, while South Africa has a rich history of advancing gender equality in almost every area of human development, we remain far from where we should be. The Commission for Gender Equality reminds us that, despite the widespread prevalence and usage of the notion of economic empowerment, its application in practice remains an elusive policy goal. In this context, the value of a programme that mainstreams the many dimensions of this experience among public representatives is self-explanatory.

Third, we see this programme as a potential vehicle for transformative institutional change and the equitable redistribution of power. It should serve as a catalyst for deep institutional transformation by directly challenging existing power structures and gender hierarchies within

public service institutions. Leaders emerging from this programme should possess the disposition to create mechanisms for redistributing decision-making power more equitably — and the will to establish new organisational norms that value diverse leadership styles and perspectives.

Fourth, we are hoping that this programme infuses across the public service a more nuanced understanding of how gender intersects with other forms of identity — including race, class, geography, and sexuality.

This is not an academic nicety. It is a practical necessity. A gender equality agenda that does not account for the fact that a Black woman in a rural area of Limpopo experiences the state differently from a White woman in suburban Cape Town is an agenda that will reproduce the very exclusions it claims to address. The HSRC's finding on women with disabilities — twice the rate of sexual violence compared to women without disabilities — is a case in point. If your gender lens does not see disability, it is not a gender lens. It is a partial lens. And partial lenses produce partial justice.

Fifth, the Gender-Responsive Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Auditing Framework gives us the instrument to do this work. It requires government to move beyond gender-neutral planning and budgeting towards systems that deliberately recognise the different

needs, conditions, and barriers experienced by women and girls. All government departments and public entities, across all spheres, have a responsibility to implement gender-responsive planning and budgeting.

This Framework is not a suggestion. It is a directive. And yet, across government, its implementation remains uneven. In too many departments, planning continues as though gender is irrelevant to infrastructure, to transport, to energy, to water, to digital access. The result is that public resources continue to flow in patterns that reproduce the very inequalities our Constitution was designed to dismantle. This programme is, in part, about equipping you to change those patterns — not through protest, but through the quiet, persistent, evidence-based work of gender-responsive governance.

CLOSING

Programme Director,

This is where leadership matters.

Leadership for gender equality is demonstrated in the choices we make when plans are drafted, when budgets are allocated, when procurement

decisions are made, when data is collected, when performance is assessed, and when officials are held accountable.

A gender-responsive state must be able to answer difficult questions.

Who benefits from public resources? Who is being left behind? Are our programmes reaching the poorest women and girls? Are women with disabilities visible in our targets, budgets, and reporting systems? Are young women accessing skills, work opportunities, and enterprise support? Are we measuring real impact — or are we merely reporting activities?

These are not administrative questions only. They are questions of justice.

Over the next two and a half days, you will be taken through a journey that begins with preparing for success, moves through exploring gender and leadership, reviews the record, and culminates in turning insights into action. You will define gender-transformative goals and make personal leadership commitments. I urge you to take each of these steps seriously — not as an academic exercise, but as a commitment you are making to the women and girls of this country.

I do hope that when you leave this room on Thursday, you will not be the same leader who walked in on Tuesday. That is the intention.

I wish you a productive and transformative workshop, and I thank you very much.

— **END** —