



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

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

MS MMAPASEKA STEVE LETSIKE, MP

AT THE

NATIONAL DIALOGUE LGBTI SECTOR GAUTENG PILOT

ON

13 JUNE 2026 | PRETORIA WEST | 10:00



**women, youth &
persons with disabilities**
Department:
Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Programme Director,

Co-Chairpersons and members of the LGBTQIA+ Sector Steering Committee,

Leaders of LGBTI formations, civil society, faith communities, academia, labour, business, government, young people, activists, allies and compatriots,

Good morning.

Allow me to thank the LGBTI Sector of the National Dialogue of South Africa for convening this Gauteng Provincial Pilot Dialogue. This is not merely a consultation. It is a democratic intervention in the unfinished work of our Republic.

We gather at Tshwane University of Technology, in Pretoria West, in a province that carries many South African contradictions. Gauteng is the economic heart of the country, yet it is also a place of deep inequality; a province where universities and courts stand near townships, hostels, informal settlements, factories, faith communities and social movements. Here, the promise of democracy and the unfinished work of democracy stand side by side.

That is why this pilot matters. If the National Dialogue is to mean anything, it must hear South Africa in its complexity: the boardroom and the backroom, the clinic and the campus, the migrant and the worker, the disabled learner and the queer young person who is told that constitutional freedom exists only if they do not ask too loudly for it to become real.

The LGBTI sector is not gathered here as a special-interest group or decorative minority. We are here because there can be no honest National Dialogue about South Africa's future if the lives, fears, dreams, intelligence and leadership of LGBTI people are treated as secondary to the nation.

The National Dialogue has been framed as a citizen-led process to confront poverty, unemployment, inequality, corruption, violence, failing systems, social fragmentation and democratic fatigue. That is the correct frame. But from this room, we must say something more specific: a social fabric that excludes LGBTI people is already torn. A democracy that asks some citizens to hide is not fully free, and a development model that forces people to choose between survival and authenticity is not development.

The LGBTI sector must use the National Dialogue to defend the democratic floor and raise the developmental ceiling. The democratic floor is dignity, equality, freedom, non-racialism, non-sexism, and the refusal of any politics that says some people are more human than others. The developmental ceiling is legal recognition becoming lived reality; rights becoming safety, work, healthcare, education, housing, belonging and opportunity.

Programme Director, we meet in a year of extraordinary historical meaning. South Africa marks 50 years since the June 16 Uprising, 70 years since the Women's March of 1956, and 30 years since the adoption of our Constitution. These anniversaries are political mirrors. They ask whether we have been faithful to the struggles that made democracy possible.

In 1976, young people refused an education system designed for submission. They understood that Bantu Education was part of a broader system designed to discipline black thought, aspiration and possibility.

LGBTI young people must inherit that courage and lead debates about the economy, democracy, health, education, migration, climate, safety, technology and the future of work, because queer people do not live outside the national condition. They experience unemployment, poverty, public health failures, housing insecurity and digital exclusion with added layers of stigma, rejection and danger.

In 1956, the women who marched to the Union Buildings marched against pass laws, but also against a system that controlled black bodies, destroyed families, policed movement, exploited women's labour and treated African women as subjects without agency. The LGBTI sector must inherit their lesson that no struggle for freedom can be complete if it leaves another oppressed person behind. We must refuse a politics that separates bread from dignity, gender justice from economic justice, disability inclusion from democratic participation, and queer freedom from the wider struggle for human rights.

Programme Director, the late Simon Nkoli taught us that a person cannot divide their freedom into separate compartments. He reminded us that the struggle against racism and the struggle against homophobia cannot be separated, because the human being who is oppressed does not live in fragments.

A black lesbian in a township, a transgender student on a campus, an intersex child in a rural community, a gay migrant in Johannesburg, a disabled queer person trying to access public services, and a young queer person living with HIV are not experiencing the same South Africa. If the National Dialogue cannot hear these differences, it will not hear the truth.

Intersectionality is not division. It is political honesty. It recognises that inclusion is not charity; it is the condition for meaningful development. A development model that excludes women, marginalises queer people, ignores disability, abandons rural communities, humiliates migrants and treats the poor as administratively inconvenient is not development. It is a management strategy for inequality.

That is why the LGBTI sector must enter the National Dialogue not only with testimony, but with theory; not only with pain, but with proposals; not only with visibility, but with power. We must not merely say that we are here. We must say that because we are here, the country must now be built differently.

Programme Director, as we mark 30 years of South Africa's Constitution, we must remember that it was never intended to be a museum piece. It was born from struggle, negotiation, sacrifice and the insistence that a country once organised around exclusion could be remade around human dignity.

But the Constitution is weakened when a queer person is assaulted and then mocked at a police station; when a transgender person cannot access affirming healthcare; when an intersex child is treated as a medical problem rather than a human being with dignity; when a lesbian woman is

threatened for refusing patriarchy; when a disabled queer learner is excluded by infrastructure and stigma; and when poverty forces people to trade dignity for survival.

The National Dialogue must therefore become a constitutional renewal project, not because the values of the Constitution are uncertain, but because their promise remains unfinished.

We must also speak honestly about the moment in which we live. Across the world and our continent, a rising anti-gender, anti-human rights and anti-democratic movement uses fear as a political weapon. It tells societies that women's rights have gone too far, queer people are a threat, migrants are the problem, disability inclusion is a burden, and equality is foreign.

This movement does not only attack LGBTI people. It attacks democracy itself. Once a society accepts that one group's dignity can be debated, it becomes easier to debate the dignity of another. That is why the rights of women, LGBTI people, persons with disabilities, migrants and refugees are not up for renegotiation. Constitutional democracy is not up for renegotiation.

Programme Director, global lessons from national dialogues are clear: if a constituency enters dialogue without organisation, demands and leverage, it may leave with recognition but without power. The LGBTI sector must leave this pilot with architecture: a sector agenda, a provincial-to-national transmission mechanism, demands for the broader National Dialogue, working groups, accountability lines, and alliances

across youth, women, disability, labour, faith, academia, civil society and government.

What must we place before the National Dialogue?

We must insist on constitutional non-regression, because rights already recognised in the Constitution are not available for reversal. We must insist on safety and justice, because hate crimes, corrective rape, intimate partner violence, bullying, campus violence, police secondary victimisation and online harassment form an ecosystem of fear that limits how people learn, work, organise, love and participate in democracy.

We must insist on affirming health and wellbeing: mental health services that understand stigma, HIV services free of moral judgement, sexual and reproductive healthcare that does not assume everyone is heterosexual or cisgender, gender-affirming healthcare, recognition of intersex dignity, and public servants trained so the first contact with the state is not the first site of humiliation.

We must insist on economic justice, because rights without bread are incomplete, and bread without dignity is also incomplete. A young queer person needs work, a trans woman needs safe employment, a lesbian entrepreneur needs access to markets, a gay migrant needs documentation and protection, a disabled queer person needs accessible workplaces, and a gender-diverse student needs safe accommodation.

We must insist on inclusive education, data and accountability, and representation with power, because the question is not whether LGBTI

people will be spoken about, but whether LGBTI people will help author the future.

Programme Director, this dialogue must speak to faith communities with courage. Many LGBTI people pray, serve, lead, love God, care for the sick, feed communities and interpret scripture through justice and compassion. We must reject the capture of faith by hate and the weaponisation of culture against human dignity. The late Imam Muhsin Hendricks reminded us that inclusion is not the enemy of spirituality. Cruelty is.

Gauteng must not only host a dialogue; it must model serious sectoral participation. Let this pilot produce a provincial LGBTI agenda, non-negotiables on constitutional non-regression, safety, health, education, economic inclusion and representation, and immediate priorities such as safer campuses, affirming clinics, hate-crime reporting pathways, non-discriminatory shelters, municipal inclusion plans, youth mental health services and frontline official training.

Let this dialogue refuse to become only a space for pain. Pain must be heard, but pain must also be organised into power. That is the transition we must make: from visibility to influence, from survival to strategy, from consultation to co-authorship, from isolated struggle to organised democratic force.

To young LGBTI people in this room: do not surrender the public sphere to cynics, democracy to those who only remember the Constitution when it protects privilege, African culture to those who confuse culture with

control, faith to those who confuse holiness with hatred, or imagination to the difficulty of the present moment.

You belong in debates about budgets, industrial policy, climate change, policing, education, land, housing, health, migration, technology, foreign policy and the future of the continent. The National Dialogue must recognise LGBTI youth as thinkers, workers, students, entrepreneurs, artists, carers, innovators, public servants, believers, organisers and leaders.

Let me close where I began: with the unfinished work of democracy. South Africa has made extraordinary constitutional progress, but dignity remains uneven. Rights have been recognised, but safety remains unequal. Freedom has been declared, but material life remains hard. Inclusion has been promised, but too many people still experience the state as distant, cold or humiliating.

The LGBTI sector must enter the National Dialogue not as petitioners begging to be seen, but as authors of the next democratic settlement. Let us defend the democratic floor, raise the developmental ceiling, refuse rollback, organise across difference, build alliances, turn pain into policy, memory into mandate, visibility into power, and constitutional promise into lived reality.

At 50 years after June 16, let us be as brave as the youth who refused submission. At 70 years after the Women's March, let us be as united as the women who knew freedom cannot be divided. At 30 years of the Constitution, let us be as clear as those who insisted that a country once built on exclusion could be rebuilt around dignity.

Together, we can build a South Africa where no one is forced to shrink in order to belong, where dignity is not conditional, and where LGBTI people are not merely protected by the Constitution, but are fully alive in the Republic it imagined.

I thank you.