



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

REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

DRAFT VIDEO MESSAGE

BY

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AT THE

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



[CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY]

Programme Director,

The President of COSPE, Ms Anna Meli and the leadership of COSPE,
The leadership and community of Gender Dynamix,
Activists, artists, organisers, young people, human rights defenders,
feminists, queer communities, climate justice movements, and all those
gathered across Cape Town, Florence, Bologna and Cali,

I greet you with revolutionary warmth, deep appreciation, and a profound
sense of solidarity.

Allow me to begin, not in the language of protocol, but in the language of
imagination.

Let us imagine that, many years from now, a young African girl sits under
the shade of a tree in a township, a village, a favela, a settlement, or a city
that has finally learnt how to love all its children. She opens a letter written
from the future, addressed to the ancestors of liberation.

It says:

Dear Nkrumah, dear Sankara, dear Fanon, dear Biko, dear Charlotte
Maxeke, dear Mama Winnie, dear all who dared to dream before the world
was ready,

We finally understood what you were trying to teach us. We learnt that
freedom was not complete when a flag was raised, when a constitution
was signed, or when a border was redrawn. We learnt that freedom is only

real when every human being can walk into the world without shrinking themselves to survive it.

We learnt that a nation is not free while women are unsafe, while young people are unemployed, while persons with disabilities are designed out of public life, while LGBTI persons are forced to negotiate their existence, while migrants are treated as strangers to humanity, and while poor communities are pushed to the margins and then blamed for surviving there.

We learnt that liberation is not a museum, it is a daily construction site. That is the future I wish to speak from today, and that is why this ReClaim Festival matters.

The word “reclaim” is not soft. It is not decorative. To reclaim is to declare that something was taken. It is to say that civic space was narrowed, culture was commodified, bodies were controlled, identities were criminalised, languages were silenced, and communities were pushed to the edges of society and then told that the centre was not built for them.

To reclaim is to refuse that lie.

It is to say that the periphery is not a place of weakness, but a place of invention. It is where new languages of justice are born. It is where young people create movements before institutions know how to name them. It is where queer communities manufacture belonging in a world that often denies them dignity. It is where persons with disabilities teach society that accessibility is not charity, but justice.

This is why we must defend civic space with courage.

Across the world, we are witnessing the rise of anti-gender, anti-democratic and anti-human rights movements. They do not always arrive wearing uniforms. Sometimes they arrive wearing the language of tradition, morality, religion, family, sovereignty or development. But their purpose is clear.

They seek to discipline women back into silence. They seek to erase LGBTI persons from public life. They seek to make disability invisible. They seek to convert poverty into personal failure. They seek to make young people spectators in economies they are expected to inherit.

We must be clear, any politics that asks a human being to surrender their dignity in order to belong is not culture. It is domination. Any development that grows economies while leaving people outside the gates is not progress. It is exclusion with better vocabulary. Any democracy that allows people to vote but denies them safety, food, work, identity, accessibility and voice is not yet complete.

Our task is to complete democracy.

And we complete democracy by making intersectional justice the organising principle of public life.

Intersectionality reminds us that human beings do not live single-issue lives. A young lesbian woman in a township is not only confronting homophobia. She may also be confronting unemployment, gender-based violence, poverty, spatial apartheid and the fear of walking home at night.

A transgender person seeking healthcare is not only confronting transphobia. They may also be confronting a clinic that has not been trained, a form that does not recognise them, and an economy that has already excluded them. A young person with a disability is not only confronting impairment. They are confronting inaccessible transport, schools, workplaces and public spaces.

This is why justice cannot be delivered in fragments. The future demands a house of justice with many rooms, many languages, many bodies, many histories and many ways of being human.

But this struggle is bigger than South Africa.

The ReClaim Festival connects Cape Town, Florence, Bologna and Cali. It reminds us that struggles may be local, but they are never isolated. The township and the favela speak to each other. The informal settlement and the migrant neighbourhood recognise each other. The rural village and the island facing climate disaster are familiar with each other's struggles. The queer activist in Cape Town and the feminist organiser in Latin America are part of the same global conversation.

This is why South-South cooperation is not a diplomatic phrase, it is a survival strategy.

For too long, the knowledge of the Global South has been treated as testimony rather than theory, as experience rather than expertise, as pain rather than policy. We have been told that solutions must travel from North to South, from centre to margin, from capital to community.

But the future will not be built that way.

The future must be built through equal dialogue among peoples who know what it means to resist erasure. It must be built by cities learning from communities, governments learning from activists, institutions learning from artists, and continents learning from one another without arrogance.

Because our struggles are connected.

Climate justice is connected to gender justice because when drought, floods and food insecurity arrive, women and girls often carry the heaviest burden of care. Economic justice is connected to disability justice because an inaccessible workplace is an unemployment policy in disguise. Digital justice is connected to youth justice because technology that excludes the poor does not liberate; it deepens inequality.

This is the politics of wholeness.

As government, we must understand that we are not the owners of justice. We are its servants. Our role is to build bridges between territories, cultures and generations; to create laws, budgets, programmes and institutions that allow people to participate in every area of human endeavour without restriction.

That means participation in education, in the mainstream economy, in culture, in technology, in public decision-making, in safety, in sport, in science, in land, in work, in imagination and in joy.

We must refuse a world where some people are only invited to participate as victims, beneficiaries or statistics. The marginalised are not waiting to be saved. They are already leading. They are already theorising. They are already building new futures in the cracks of old systems.

So, as we gather under the banner of ReClaim, let us reclaim culture from exclusion. Let us reclaim civic space from fear. Let us reclaim development from technocrats who forget the human face. Let us reclaim democracy from those who want rights for themselves and silence for others. Let us reclaim the city from spatial injustice. Let us reclaim the economy from greed. Let us reclaim the body from violence. Let us reclaim the future from despair. I want us to imagine that future clearly where justice is not an event, but the ordinary weather of everyday life.

To COSPE, thank you for creating a platform that understands that culture is not entertainment alone. Culture is memory. Culture is resistance. Culture is a rehearsal for the world we are trying to build.

To Gender Dynamix and all South African partners, thank you for reminding us that human rights work is not abstract. It is carried in bodies, in names, in pronouns, in scars, in songs, in court cases, in community meetings, in safe spaces and in brave lives.

Let us reclaim the future with art, with policy, with solidarity and with courage, and let us build a world where no human being has to ask permission to be fully alive.

I thank you.