



**DRAFT SPEAKING NOTES FOR THE MINISTER IN THE
PRESIDENCY
FOR WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES
MS SINDISIWE LYDIA CHIKUNGA, MP**

**BILATERAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE KINGDOM OF THE
NETHERLANDS
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING (MOU) SIGNING
CEREMONY**

20 June 2026 | Pretoria, South Africa

SALUTATIONS

- Your excellency, Ambassador Joane Doornewaard
- Deputy Minister , Mmapaseka Steve Letsike
- Acting Director General (DWYPD) Dr. Praveena Sukhraj-Ely
- Officials from the Embassy of the Netherlands
- Officials from the Department of International Relations and Cooperation
- Officials from Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities
- Acting Deputy Director General Mr Dire Segatlhe

Good Morning !

Context Setting

Your Excellency, on behalf of the South African Government, and all 60 million South Africans, I wish to express, from the onset, our sincere gratitude to the government and the people of the **Kingdom of the Netherlands** for this important milestone in our diplomatic relations. Personally, I am deeply honoured to join you — alongside both our delegations — to witness **this giant leap in the strengthening of bilateral relations between the Kingdom of the Netherlands and the Republic of South Africa.**

South Africa and the Netherlands maintain warm bilateral relations across a range of key developmental issues. Importantly, our two countries signed a **Memorandum of Understanding on the Establishment of a Joint Commission of Cooperation (JCC)** on **19 November 2015**, which provides a solid basis for consultation and further cooperation.

More recently, the **2023 Joint Communiqué of the Third Meeting of South Africa–Netherlands Joint Commission for Cooperation** highlighted several strategic areas of collaboration.

The Netherlands is a major investor in the South African economy, and one of our key trading partners. Your citizens

make up **one of the largest sources of overseas tourists to the South African economy**, with thousands of Dutch citizens visiting our country every year.

South Africa values this partnership, particularly the extent to which it has and continues to be founded on **mutual respect, constitutional democracy, the protection of human rights, sustainable development and an unwavering commitment to multilateral cooperation**.

In signing this Memorandum of Understanding, we are transforming our historic diplomatic goodwill into tangible socio-economic opportunities for the citizens of both our nations.

G20 Reflections and Appreciation

Your Excellency, I also wish to thank you for the support we received from the Netherlands during **South Africa's G20 Presidency** — especially your support for the priorities of the **Empowerment of Women Working Group (EWWG)**, which I chaired on behalf of the South African government.

We made significant strides in advancing gender equality and women's empowerment within the EWWG, and we appreciate your commitment and solidarity as we continue to execute our **G20 Legacy Projects**. Allow me to flag **three** of these:

First, it is the development of a comprehensive **Care Economy Strategy for South Africa** — a strategy that will enable us to

lead a society that **recognises, reduces, and redistributes** the disproportionate burden of unpaid care work that falls on women and girls, and that invests in the care sector as a driver of decent employment and economic growth.

Second, it is our continued work on **Positive Masculinity** — engaging men and boys as **allies** in the fight against gender-based violence, and in the transformation of harmful gender norms.

Third, as part of our efforts to realise a **disability-inclusive society**, we have made significant strides towards the establishment of the **Disability Inclusion Nerve Centre of Excellence** — a catalytic project that will draw from domestic and international experiences in order to mainstream and monitor the implementation of our **White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities**, and to ensure that South Africa continues to honour its multilateral commitments.

A Historic Year for Women

Your Excellency, The global landscape for gender equality presents a sobering picture — **one of hard-won progress alongside persistent and deepening setbacks**.

This year, the United Nations is two decades shy of a century since its founding. The UN's founding Charter placed the equal rights of women and men at the heart of its purposes. Yet for

much of these eighty years, the formal commitments of the Charter **coexisted with the systematic exclusion of women** from the institutions, the negotiations, and the decision-making spaces through which those commitments were supposed to be realised.

It has been the organised, persistent, and often unglamorous work of women — **as diplomats, activists, researchers, heads of state, and ordinary citizens refusing to be silenced** — that has placed gender equality at the very centre of multilateralism. From the **Commission on the Status of Women** — to the adoption of **CEDAW in 1979**, the international bill of rights for women — to the **Beijing Platform for Action in 1995** — to the creation of **UN Women in 2010** — women have been the architects of the very frameworks designed to protect them.

Here at home, our MoU is timely because **2026** also marks the **Platinum Jubilee** — the **70th anniversary of the 9th of August 1956 Women's March** — the **Golden Jubilee, 50 years since the 16 June 1976 Youth Uprisings** — and **three decades since our Constitution became the supreme law of the land**.

Key projects that will emanate from our continued cooperation will serve to honour **the more than twenty thousand women who marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria** to challenge the very foundations of apartheid, and to build a truly inclusive society.

Seventy years later, **the gender equality dimension of our MoU honours our women's heroic actions** — actions that remain both an inspiration and a challenge. **An inspiration**, because they tell us what organised, courageous, solidarity-rooted action can achieve. **A challenge**, because they force us to contend with how far we still are from the South Africa those women imagined.

Fifty years later, **the youth empowerment dimension of our MoU** should give practical expression to the dreams of the Class of 1976, and to the urgent need to turn skills development into lifelong socio-economic empowerment.

A Bilateral Expression of Our Multilateral Commitments

Finally, this MoU gives bilateral expression to commitments our two countries have already made on multilateral platforms. It honours our collaborative work on the **Women, Peace and Security Agenda under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325**.

It also reaffirms our shared, bold and assertive position on gender equality and empowerment at the multilateral level — a position we advanced together at the **70th Session of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women (CSW70)**, where both the Netherlands and South Africa reaffirmed the importance of investing in women's economic

empowerment, of eliminating gender-based violence, of increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making, and of ensuring that digital transformation creates opportunities for women and girls, rather than widening existing inequalities.

As I conclude, I wish to say the following to our Officials. As MoU without an Implementation Plan with defined delivery timelines cannot touch lives. We expect you to consult and finalize this implementation plan before the end of August - which is Women's month. The Netherlands is the largest exporter of agricultural products in Europe and the second-largest in the world - We need that technology, we need that know-how and we need that market expertise in the hands of South African women who desperately need a catalyst to transform their economic fortunes. This MoU cannot and should not gather dust.

Your Excellency, as we sign this MoU, we reaffirm together that investing in women, in youth, and in persons with disabilities is investing in stronger families, stronger economies, stronger societies — and a more peaceful, more equitable world.

God Bless South Africa, God Bless the Netherlands.

I thank you.