



Address by President Cyril Ramaphosa on the occasion of National Women's Day Vryburg, Ruth Mompoti District Municipality, 9 August 2019

Minister in The Presidency for Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Ms Maite Nkoana-Mashabane,

All Minister and Deputy Minister present,

Premier Tebogo Job Mokgoro,

Premier Zamani Saul

Speaker of the National Assembly,

MECs

Mayor of the Ruth Mompoti District Municipality,

President of ANC Womens League, Bathabile Dlamini

Fellow South Africans,

It is an honour to be here to commemorate National Women's Day in the birthplace of one of our greatest heroes, Isithwalandwe Seaparankoe Dr Ruth Segomotsi Mompoti.

Mama Ruth was a stalwart of the liberation movement, a freedom fighter and a committed gender activist.

She was among the great leaders of her generation.

She answered to a higher calling to be of service to humanity, without expectation

of recognition or reward.

She was one of the women of which our young star poet Koleka Putuma wrote:

'I said a lineage of greatness is born
Women who have stood on the front lines of battlefields
Yielded their present for the future of others.'

We salute their resilience, their strength and their power.

Today, we also pay tribute to the present generation who have taken up the baton of struggle towards a truly non-sexist and egalitarian society.

They are blazing a trail: in the workplace and in the boardrooms, in our factories and on our farms, in our Parliament and in our civil society organisations.

They are pathfinders like Dr Mary-Jane Bopape, the chief scientist for weather research at the South African Weather Service, who is leading a specialist team to produce this country's first ever weather and climate change modelling system.

They are farming specialists like Mmabatho Morudi from right here in North West, whose farm in Winterveld offers free bee pollination services to rural farmers.

They are entrepreneurs like nuclear scientist Nomso Kana whose company manufactures fibre-optic cables that are critical for the rollout of broadband infrastructure.

They are researchers like University of the Western Cape graduate student Shireen Mentor, who grew up witnessing the ravages of drug abuse in her community of Mannenberg, and is now conducting ground-breaking research into the effects of substance abuse on the brain.

They are tech industry leaders like Zandile Keebine, whose organisation GirlCode hosts coding clubs and workshops for high school girls, and teaches basic computer literacy skills to unemployed women.

They are the women of Banyana Banyana who are on a winning streak and have just scored their way into the COSAFA finals.

All these women, and many, many more like them, are changing South Africa for the better.

They are shining examples of the strides our country has made since democracy, and of the even greater heights we are yet to attain.

Fellow South Africans,

As we mark 25 years of democracy, we can say with certainty that we have made a real difference in the lives of women.

We have implemented policies and programmes to give practical expression to women's rights to education, to health care, to basic services and to social support.

Today, women comprise 58% of all students enrolled at universities and colleges around the country.

Forty-seven per cent of MPs are women.

This year, we achieved 50/50 gender parity among Cabinet Ministers for the first time.

But we know there can be no true liberation of women unless they are economically empowered.

For generations, black women in particular have carried the greatest burden of apartheid dispossession and deliberate underdevelopment.

Today, that legacy continues, but it is worsened by the dire economic situation in our country.

Over 10 million South Africans, men and women, are unemployed.

Our economy has not been growing and public finances are severely constrained.

Yet while our economy is in crisis, we are by no means powerless.

Working together with partners in business and labour, in communities and across civil society, we are taking measures to restore our economy and create economic opportunities, especially for women and youth.

We are implementing a revitalised industrial strategy in support of key growth sectors in the economy with the greatest potential to create jobs.

We are finalising the establishment of a new Infrastructure Fund with a clear plan to revive investment in infrastructure, which will drive economic activity and boost manufacturing.

We are implementing a range of interventions to ease the cost of doing business, and making South Africa a competitive investment destination.

We are working to expand the number of small businesses and improve their success rate, through greater support and creating space for new market entrants.

Women are disproportionately affected by unemployment and are in the lowest earning categories, making them vulnerable to poverty.

According to the figures released last week by Statistics South Africa, the expanded unemployment rate among women stands at 42.5%, while it stands at 35% among men.

It is therefore critical that as we implement measures to address the jobs crisis in this country, we give special attention to the economic position of women.

As we implement the agreements of last year's Jobs Summit, we are working to ensure that we overcome the disadvantages that confront women in the world of work.

The empowerment of women remains an important part of our employment equity and Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment policies.

As we expand our work in special economic zones, we will have a specific programme to support women's participation across the value chain, and bring more women into the Black Industrialists Programme.

This programme, although only five years old, has already achieved its five year target for women entrepreneurs.

It has approved R6.6 billion for women-owned businesses against a target of R4.4 billion.

Over the last four years, our state-owned companies have spent a total of R100 billion on goods and services from women-owned businesses.

These SOCs also have a crucial contribution to make in providing young women with the skills they need to succeed in a changing economy.

In the last year, state-owned companies enrolled over 2,700 female learners in training programmes to become artisans, technicians and engineers.

Cabinet recently approved the Gender-Responsive Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, Evaluation and Auditing Framework.

Under this new framework, all government plans and budgets will have to include gender-specific delivery targets.

These commitments will be written into the Performance Agreements of Ministers, Premiers, Directors-General and all senior managers in the public service.

An example is the procurement target set by the Department of Social Development, in partnership with the National Development Agency.

In the coming financial year, R124 million will be set aside from the Social Relief of Distress programme for procuring goods and services from women and youth-owned cooperatives and small businesses.

One area in which we can have the greatest impact on improving the lives of women, especially rural women, is in access to and ownership of land.

As we proceed with our land reform programme, we must confront the issue that we are sometimes reluctant to speak about: that women are being denied the right to own land in the name of culture and tradition.

This is unacceptable, especially in a country where our Constitution guarantees the equality of men and women.

To the women of North West and around the country – in our villages, on our farms and in our cities – I have a message for you today.

We will respect and enforce your rights to land.

Where there are deficiencies in our laws, and with their implementation we will correct them.

The Freedom Charter promised that the land shall be shared amongst those who work it, and this includes boMme, boSisi, bo Mama, all of you.

Let us agree here that we will realise the economic liberation of women in our lifetime.

Re tlo e etsa. Ro etsa ka Pele! Ro itlhaganela! Sizakhawuleza!

We will also correct whatever is standing in the way of this nation's women and girls enjoying quality and accessible health care, including reproductive health care.

In 1994, in one of his first acts as President of a newly-democratic South Africa, Nelson Mandela declared that pregnant women and children under the age of 6 would receive free health care in public facilities.

He did this because he knew that access to quality health care is fundamental to improving the lives of women.

We have heard your concerns, here in North West, about the poor quality of service at our hospitals and clinics.

Under Premier Mokgoro's leadership we are working to turn this around, to ensure women and girls receive the best primary and secondary health care.

Just over two weeks ago, we signed a Presidential Health Compact with stakeholders across the health sector on a series of measures to significantly improve the quality of the health care our people receive.

We are going to ensure that women and girls are direct beneficiaries of the National

Health Insurance once it is implemented.

All of these interventions are to ensure the women of this country are healthy, that their needs are responded to, and that the doors of opportunity are opened to them.

Bagaetsho,

No woman who is a mother or a grandmother can leave home to work if her children are not being properly cared for in a safe environment that supports learning.

In the past financial year we have provided funding for nearly 700,000 children to attend early childhood development centres around the country.

Through the ECD Conditional Grant we also subsidised over 60,000 vulnerable children, and want to double this amount over the next five years.

Through the Isibindi project we are assisting communities with caring for orphaned and vulnerable children, such as applying for birth certificates, assisting with clinic visits and offering study support.

I was greatly touched by the story of Sharon Tshitale, who was helped by the programme when she lost her mother at the age of 10 and had nobody to care for her.

Today she is studying for her BCom at the University of Venda, and is giving back to her community as a mentor.

It takes a village to raise a child, and the mothers and grandmothers of our nation should know that we will continue to do everything within our means to support them.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Gender-based violence is a crisis across our land.

It is the worst form of desecration of the Constitution and its promise of gender equality.

Since 1994 we have passed laws to curb domestic violence and sexual violence.

We have set up specialised courts and units within the South African Police Service to ensure that perpetrators of violence against women and girls are successfully prosecuted.

We are providing shelter and support services for women and girls who have fled from abuse.

But despite our best efforts, despite our progressive laws and policies, this country's women and girls live in fear.

On the streets, in schools and universities, in churches and places of worship and, worst of all, in their homes.

We must acknowledge here, as we have in the past, the stubborn persistence of patriarchy that leads men to think they are superior to their mothers, their wives and their daughters.

We must acknowledge here, as we have in the past, that many men assume they have the right to decide whether or not a girl should go to school, or how a woman should dress and behave.

These attitudes are driving the abuse of women across society, whether they are young or old, black or white, Christian, Muslim, Hindu, atheist, rural or urban,

gender conforming or non-gender conforming.

As South Africans, we can no longer stand by as this evil sinks even deeper roots in our society.

Since government and civil society adopted a Declaration against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide last year, we have made a number of advances.

A GBV steering committee will soon begin provincial consultations on the National Strategic Plan to end gender-based violence.

The Department of Justice is in the process of amending the National Policy Framework on the Management of Sexual Offences.

We are reviewing the Domestic Violence Act to strengthen its provisions around domestic homicide and the enforcement of protection orders.

The proposed amendments will also include previously marginalised victims such as members of the LGBTQI+ community.

We all have a responsibility to end gender-based violence.

As men we become partners in abuse when we remain silent as other men use money or violence to dominate their girlfriends and wives.

As parents, as grandparents, as uncles and aunts, let us rid ourselves of old attitudes that value boys over girls.

One of our country's greatest tragedies is that far too many children grow up without their fathers.

I have seen the beautiful Women's Day tribute to Gogo Nozizwe that is trending on

social media; and it moved me greatly.

Hers is the story of millions of our hardworking mothers and grandmothers who raise children alone and in great hardship.

As men, let us step up and become better fathers to our children, and play an active role in their lives.

Let us support great initiatives like #TheBestManCanBe, a male mentorship programme being run by the creators of the Gogo Nozizwe commercial.

As sexual partners, let us care enough for each other to practice safe sex.

As all South Africans, let us condemn violence against the LGBTQI+ community, including the abominable crime of so-called 'corrective' rape.

As traditional leaders, let us educate our people against child marriage and discriminatory practices that prevent women from owning property and land.

I have made a call for all sectors of society to come together and develop a social compact to help us resolve our country's challenges.

There is a South Africa we want.

A South Africa that Mme Ruth Mompati and the women of her generation fought for.

A South Africa where women are free from discrimination and subjugation, from violence and oppression, and are given the means to uplift themselves and their families.

As government, labour, the private sector and civil society, we must work together

to drive women's empowerment, and to ensure women are given meaningful opportunities.

We call on the private sector to open up more spaces for women, especially young women entering the job market.

We call on you to roll-out more training programmes, internships and mentorships, and to work with our colleges and universities to offer more bursaries to female students especially in critical skills needed by our economy.

We also call on the private sector to join hands with the SAPS and NGOs to improve victim support centres at our police stations and at our hospitals and clinics.

We call on labour and civil society to deepen your activism to ensure that equal pay for equal work is enforced, that women are protected from harassment in the workplace, that the national minimum wage is applied, and that vulnerable groups such as domestic workers are afforded greater protection.

Fellow South Africans,

On this National Women's Day, we pay homage to the generations who came before us, who lit the path to our freedom.

Let us be the generation that ends sexism, patriarchy and violence against women in all its forms.

Let us be the generation that realises the economic emancipation of all South African women.

Today, let us commit to doing our part to realise the South Africa we want – a South Africa of equal opportunity, prosperity and peace for women and for men, in the here and now, and into the future.

I thank you.