



President Cyril Ramaphosa: Women's Day 2021

9 Aug 2021

Fellow South Africans,

Today is an important day in the life of the women of our country, but also in the life of our nation.

Exactly 65 years ago today, 20,000 South African women from all walks of life and various parts of the country marched to the Union Buildings to demand an end to the dehumanising pass laws.

Despite the dangers of challenging apartheid authorities, they asserted their worth as human beings and refused to be relegated to the margins of history in their own country.

We salute the courage of this generation and its leaders, among them Lilian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa, Helen Joseph, Sophie De Bruyn, Albertina Sisulu, Bertha Gxowa, Motlalepula Chabaku and many others.

We have declared 2021 as the Year of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke, a courageous women's rights activist and also a leader who was born 150 years ago. We celebrate this year of her birth because we want to encourage the women of this country to follow her example and to follow in her footsteps.

We celebrate the resolve of these women to determine their own destiny.

At the same time we pay tribute to today's generation of women.

Just as the women of 1956 fought against the injustices of their time, the women of today are engaged in a new frontier of struggle.

It is a struggle for equal rights, dignity, economic liberation and freedom from violence.

Women have always been instrumental in the advancement of the human cause.

They have played a crucial role in the struggle for freedom, justice and equality.

And yet it is women who always bear the brunt of inequality, discrimination, marginalisation, poverty and violence.

Like the women of 1956, the present generation of women must lead the struggle for a society that is free of these ills and particularly the patriarchal relations that cause them.

Such a society is both possible and absolutely necessary.

By working together, by refusing to submit, we will achieve true gender equality in our lifetime.

If we are to do so, we must eradicate all forms of gender-based violence.

Violence against women, children, gender non-conforming persons and members of the LGBTQI+ community threatens the very foundations of our democracy.

It has been three years since we convened the Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide to end this scourge.

Last year, we launched the National Strategic Plan to end gender-based violence and femicide.

It has been greatly encouraging that different segments of society, from the faith community, to business, to developmental partners, to broader civil society – that they have all taken ownership of the National Strategic Plan and made it an important part of their work.

Today, we are formally releasing the one-year progress report on the implementation of the National Strategic Plan.

Over the past year, in partnership with civil society, we have worked together to give effect to the six pillars of the National Strategic Plan.

Although the launch of the Plan coincided with the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have nevertheless made measurable progress.

As part of the work to provide justice and support to survivors of gender-based violence, 32 regional courts have been designated as sexual offences courts in various parts the country.

Around 3,500 Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences investigating officers have received specialised training to do their work.

Twelve public buildings have been renovated and repurposed to be used as shelters, and work has been done to ensure that all police stations in our country have sexual assault evidence kits.

There has been important legal reform as well.

Key legislation around domestic violence, bail and the sentencing of offenders, as well as broadening the scope of sexual offences and other matters is currently before Parliament.

Our courts are handing down harsh penalties and sentences to those found guilty of gender-based violence and conviction rates in sexual offences cases have improved.

We will soon ratify the International Labour Organization's Convention 190, which addresses sexual harassment and violence in the workplace.

Earlier this year we launched the first phase of an innovative GBVF Private Sector Response Fund. This Fund has to date received some R141 million in pledges.

Based on the success of raising funds, I call on businesses, donors, philanthropists and individuals to contribute to the Fund's work.

Government has allocated approximately R21 billion over the next three years to support the six pillars of the National Strategic Plan.

A critical pillar of the Plan is to ensure women's economic and financial inclusion.

One way we are achieving this is by creating procurement opportunities for women-owned businesses within the public sector supply chain.

Last year we announced that 40 per cent of public procurement should go to women-owned or -operated businesses, and we are calling on the private sector to make a similar commitment to enhance the empowerment of the women of our country.

A Women's Economic Assembly will be launched later this month to identify the supply chain opportunities for women-owned businesses in key industries such as steel, automotive and energy sectors.

Work is underway to develop a financial inclusion policy to address the barriers experienced by women-owned businesses and low-income earners to access credit, to also access grants and other financial transactions.

The Coronavirus pandemic has been particularly harsh on women and children.

When growth at the economic level stalls, when development is halted and when the economy loses jobs, we know that it is women who bear the brunt disproportionately.

The social and economic relief measures we implemented last year provided much needed support to women workers, small business owners and grant recipients.

However, we know that levels of employment and income among women have not recovered as fast as their male counterparts.

We are therefore working to ensure that women benefit from the most recent relief measures and from our Economic Reconstruction and Recovery Plan.

Our commitment towards the empowerment of women in this country has been matched by our commitment to advancing the position of women on our African continent.

We are working to ensure that the Protocol on Women in Trade enables the effective participation of African women in the African Continental Free Trade Area agreement.

We are working to ensure that women and young people are well represented at the Intra-Africa Trade Fair, which we will host in November.

South Africa was part of the United Nations Generation Equality Forum that took place in June, where we made clear commitments to protect and promote women's leadership and representation across society.

Through the Charlotte Maxeke Women's Initiative on Economic Justice and Rights, we are mobilising global support for projects that promote increased opportunities for women and girls in decision making across political and economic spheres.

Fellow South Africans,

We are determined to build a South Africa in which women will enjoy all the rights, all the freedoms and all the liberties that our Constitution guarantees.

Although we have gone a long way to empower the women of our country, we still have much further to go.

We want to live in a society where women feel safe and are safe.

We want to live in a society where women are able to assume leadership positions in the workplace, in the community, in government and in all public institutions.

We also want to live in a society where women's opportunities are not limited by social attitudes and practices or even by economic circumstances.

We want to live in a society where every girl child can study what she wants to study and for as long as she needs to, and where she can take up any occupation or pursue any career of her choice.

I call on every South African to join this most important struggle.

Let us reject sexism in our homes, in our churches, in our schools, in our organisations, in government and in places of work.

Let us together raise a new generation of men and women who understand that the rights and freedoms guaranteed by our Constitution belong to all, men and women alike.

I wish all the women of South Africa – and indeed all the people of South Africa – a happy Women's Day.

I thank you.

Issued by:
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