

**SPEECH BY L N SISULU, MINISTER OF HUMAN
SETTLEMENTS AT THE WOMEN'S MASS PRAYER AT THE
ASSEMBLIES OF GOD,
KHAYELITSHA, CAPE TOWN
31 AUGUST 2017**

“Women taking their rightful place as leaders of society”

Programme Director;
Ladies and Gentlemen

Introduction

It is a real privilege that I am here as your guest at this Women's Mass Prayer. A very rare privilege because I am surrounded by people who really care and believe that when we are united in prayer, we can direct society to create an environment where women and girl children can be safe, live in safe neighbourhoods and grow up to fulfil their dreams in a better world.

I want to thank in particular Reverend Nkomfa for conceptualising this Mass Prayer for Women and for his dedication and commitment. I would also like to thank Reverend Rweqana and Reverend Faleni for all the effort they have put in to ensure that we have this day. Thank you to all of you, the churches and our guests.

As we have this Mass Prayer in celebration of women, I want to acknowledge the role of the churches for the pillar of strength they have been for all of us in our daily struggles, but in particular for the role that the

churches have played in our struggle for liberation. By the time we leave tonight, I would like to have a feeling that they support us as we govern.

We, the ANC, were founded in the church and we remain rooted in the church. I would like you to keep us in your prayers at all times. When we are in pain, when we are hard at work to improve the lives of our people, when we go wrong or when we triumph. Keep us in your prayers as we seek answers to difficult situations.

We are celebrating women in this month and it is not a coincidence that we are here on the last day of the month to seal off the honour that women deserve. We celebrated the whole month and now it is time that we come up with some concrete steps to ensure that our celebrations are not a mere token. The irony of this month is that for some reason violence against women peaked in the period just before this month and the spike has continued right through the month. During the past month we have read about a number of high profile cases of violence against women. Six white men attacked and assaulted a black couple outside the KFC in Montana, Pretoria North, and in video footage of the incident, the woman victim can be heard screaming and asking the attackers if they are going to hit her, a woman – which they do. Former Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Mduzuzi Manana attacking Mandisa Duma, former Kaizer Chiefs footballer Marks Maponyane was found guilty of assaulting his ex-wife Sylvia throughout their marriage.

Then there was Reeva Steenkamp, Jayde Panayiotou (Panajoti), Fatima Patel, Anni Dewani, Zanele Khumalo, Dolly Tshabalala. These are only some of the names of women who were allegedly killed by men they trusted. What is sad is that there is at least 142 reported cases of violence against women on

any given per day. We only know those few who make it to the media, because their attackers are well-known. The rest remain unknown. The reality is that we know this through the media feed on the sensation hyped around the known attacker, while the victim anonymously falls by the way side as simply another statistic.

In a recent article, the Statistician-General indicated that the rise in drug abuse is a primary driver of violence against women. I have no doubt that the abuse of drugs has been a major factor in the decline of our moral fabric, but that does not explain why the violence is not perpetrated against other males. The violence is aimed at women, precisely because our culture and societal tolerance has allowed it.

It has always been the norm that if you are unhappy with your wife, you can be excused for using your physical power over her through violence and for too long we have allowed this matter to go on. Judging by the fact that most of these men are churchgoers, the churches themselves have allowed this to go on for too long. You can tolerate a situation where society accepts prejudicial practices up to a point, but the churches should at all times be at the forefront of this fight against gender-based violence.

We ask you not to join us in our efforts to fight violence against women, but to lead us. You are the moral compass of society and I am certain that if the Bible had to be rewritten in the current context, it would have 11 commandments, with the 11th being, “thou shall’t not raise your hand against a woman”.

The statistics of violence against women in this country is horrific. At the last polls we found the shocking statistics that in 2015/16, 51 895 sexual

offences were recorded and only 1 of 3 incidents are actually reported¹. According to a recent study conducted by the SAMRC²:

- Two out of three victims withdraw from a case;
- One third of cases are withdrawn due to insufficient evidence;
- Only 18.5% of reported cases go to trial;
- In only 8.6% of such cases will there be a guilty verdict;
- Only 10% of gang rape cases go to trial;
- A rape survivor who reports the crime to the police has less than a one in 10 chance of seeing the perpetrator convicted.

The huge underreporting of crimes of violence against women is because of the continued subjugation of women who will lose their financial support. The continued economic inequality and the financial dependency on the males has created this situation.

We have to empower women to remove themselves from this unhealthy dependency on men for financial security. When empowered women are naturally able to look after their families, without compromising their security. Let us give them the tools to be able to do that, so that they are not faced with difficult situations. We in the ANC believe that when you empower a woman, you empower a village, you empower a nation.

Women must be encouraged to take a stand and report all cases of violence, whatever the circumstances. And the churches have to open up as places of refuge for women who encounter violence at home. When we encourage women to **say no to violence**, there has to be an alternative for

¹ Stats SA Victims of Crime Survey 2015/16

² Every Eight Hours - Research Brief by Medical Research Council, August 2012

them to turn to and I would like to think that the church would be the first place they would naturally turn to. We as government have to increase our places of safety for women. I for one would not be adverse to decision that for every church, a house of safety should be built where women can feel supported by the institution of the church.

I want to return to the matter I referred to earlier of the Statistician-General, who indicated that the rise in the abuse of drugs gives rise to the abuse of women. There are countries where the abuse of drugs is much higher than in South Africa, but their dependency do not reflect in the levels of violence against women that we have in this country.

The nub of the problem of the society like ours is patriarchy. Patriarchy is as strong today in a free and democratic society as it was when we entered the struggle. A patriarchy has its base in a culture that inherently gives power of a man over a woman. In the context of the church, which constantly preaches that men and women were created equal, the challenge against patriarchy ought to be spearheaded by the churches in the same way they fought against racism and Apartheid.

While racism was entrenched and normalised through the ideology of Apartheid, the gender inequality is normalised and made acceptable through patriarchy. It must be our last struggle to remove all vestiges of patriarchy in our society and it **MUST** start with the churches.

We all love our cultures and our traditions, but there is nothing inherent in it that creates inequality. Patriarchy is a social arrangement, created for the dominance of one over the other without any traditional logic to it. Some of our cultures in Southern Africa attest to this fact, but their

dominance is on the decline, because patriarchy is convenient for a male dominated society.

Women of the church have got to take up this struggle alongside women of the communities, because change will only come to when freedom means that indeed all of us are equal before the eyes of God. For this equality to embed itself in the national psyche, the question of whether South Africa is ready for a female President should no longer even be contemplated. Some of our greatest warriors against imperialism are women that led armies of men and Queen Mantatise is one example. History has many other examples. Democratic South Africa has always been ready for a female President. It is ready now, for a better future for our children.

In closing, I want to make a special plea that the churches help actively to take us to a better life for all. What can the church help this country with? As a political leader who, on a daily basis deals with the struggles of our people and nation, I wish to ask that churches help this new nation and pray for the following.

1. Help us pray for the end of greed and corruption in public service. Greed in the public service is our enemy number one to the development of our nation. Instead of working for the poor, some people work for themselves and their comfort.

2. Help us pray against a lazy attitude towards work. Instead of completing work in a week, in most cases our people will take a month and forever.

3. Help us pray for leaders who will honour God in all they do. Leaders who will serve the people and not expect to be served. Leaders who will care about those that they lead, care about their nation and uphold high moral standards.

4. Help us pray for the end of the abuse of women and children. Help these men to appreciate women and value them as their fellow beings and not as objects of assaults and victimization. Recently a young woman was killed at a Night club in Sunnyside in Pretoria simply because she refused to go home with a guy who had bought her some drinks.

5. Help us pray against the abuse of many evil substances such as alcohol and. drugs. Rescue our youth from Nyaope that terrorizes many households. Now government is contemplating conducting drug tests at all schools in Gauteng as evidence of the prevalence of substance abuse by our children.

6. Help us pray for the end of crime that terrorises our citizens on a daily basis. Women are not free to walk our streets. Children fear for the lurking evil, shop owners fear for armed robbers and house owners fortify themselves behind high walls, gilded gates and an assortment of security systems. How can we enjoy our freedom when we live in constant fear?

7. Help us pray against the scourge of teen pregnancies. Youth deprived of their prime life because they have to bear children.

8. Help us pray for caring civil servants. For caring teachers, for caring nurses, for caring police and for caring doctors.

9. Help us pray for caring husbands who will value their wives and families. For husbands who will protect and provide for their families.

10. Help us pray for formidable women, who the very pillars of our nation, who bear the brunt of many insults, hurts and infidelity. Make them strong because if they are weak this nation will crumble.

I thank you