

SPEECH BY L N SISULU, MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS AT WOMEN'S DAY
CELEBRATIONS OF THE CAPE PENINSULA UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
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Programme Director;  
Ladies and Gentlemen

At the recent Policy Conference of the ANC, the Commission on Social Transformation dedicated a great deal of time to an abhorrent problem facing our society - gender-based violence (gbv). In all of this we came to the conclusion that our immediate recourse would be to recommend severe sentences for crimes against women.

Gender-based violence is a dominant, very worrying and escalating crime, impacting very negatively on our national psyche. We have come to understand it as a breach of the fundamental right to life, liberty, security, dignity, physical and mental integrity and well-being and a direct breach of the Constitution and the Bill of Rights and the consequences need to be seen in that light.

Traditionally both StatsSA and the SAPS have found it very difficult to accurately research and interrogate this crime and SAPS have frequently indicated the complexity in assessing this crime, because it occurs largely between intimate persons in a domestic terrain and is based only on reported incidents. At the last polls we found the shocking statistics that in 2015/16, 51 895 sexual offences were recorded and that is an average of 142.2 per day considering that only 1 of 3 incidents are actually reported . According to a recent study conducted by the SAMRC , 94.1% of victims in rape cases reported to police were women. A rape survivor in South Africa who reports the crime to SAPS has less than a one in 10 chance of seeing the perpetrator convicted. In only 8.6% of such cases will there be a guilty verdict. Only 18.5% of reported cases go to trial, two out of three victims withdraw from a case; one third of cases are withdrawn due to insufficient evidence. Only 10% of gang rape cases go to trial.

The toll meted out on society by this level of violence is not only economical, but also psychological. A 2014 KPMG Report indicates that gender-based violence costs South Africa between R28.4 billion and R42.4 billion per year – or between 0.9% and 1.3% of GDP annually. The psychological impact is immeasurable.

All of this is happening in a country where women fought in a struggle against Apartheid, with the intention that the liberation struggle would eventually liberate them from all patriarchal forms of social relations that oppress them.

Deliberate and consistent laws, programmes and actions have been adopted and effected, led by the democratic government, with the specific objective being the emancipation and empowerment of women. This important work continues to be done, as part of the historic duty to ensure that the women of South Africa will no longer be merely, the traditional gatherers of wood and drawers of water.

In this regard, the South African Government, NGOs, civic and labour bodies, as well as other structures, have correctly expended vast amounts of energy and resources for the advancement of women. These include:

- A dedicated Government Ministry that deals with women issues;
- Public-Private sector initiatives to empower the girl-child;
- Skills and educational programmes for the girl-child;
- Sterling work by NGOs on educational and information programmes around gender issues;
- Economic strategies to empower women, including very specific Broad-Based Black Economic

Empowerment legislation; as well as many other initiatives.

Despite all these efforts, there has been a stubborn resistance, in some quarters to the essential work of fighting gender discrimination.

But more tragically and shamefully for a country that waged a heroic struggle to defeat apartheid, there has been a disturbing increase in gender-based violence across South Africa, perpetrated mainly, by men

from all social strata. These include the alarming rates of femicide, rape, and different forms of abuse, amongst which are financial, psychological and physical. Indeed, all these unacceptable high levels of violence also include those against children.

We as a society may be on our way to overcoming most of the societal entrenched oppression and suppression of one group by another. But patriarchy remains intact and no matter the effort put into the advancement of women, the foundation of our society remains patriarchal and for as long patriarchy remains the foundation of our social relations, anything else we do will not deal with the fundamental transformation of the society that we need.

For women, radical transformation means the removal of patriarchy. Many have argued that perhaps it is the rapid destabilisation of men's dominance and their insecurity that has resulted in this scourge of violence. Of course, there may be some who would argue that this gender-based-violence may not be the result, solely, of patriarchal tendencies. Yet, the reality is that many patriarchal societies on the African continent and elsewhere in the world, have not descended to these grotesque and barbaric levels of violence against women and children.

Undoubtedly, this is the matter that baffles many patriots and activists who have waged a life long struggle against political, economic and gender discrimination and oppression against women. In this context, as South Africans we need to closely interrogate all the causes and factors that give rise to these unacceptable actions that continue to defile our social and moral fabric.

A community activist working in this area, Matebogo Mampane, made the following observation:

"In the many workshops that I have facilitated, the general feeling among young men is that they feel marginalized, excluded, disempowered while extraordinary efforts are being made to empower and advance their female counterparts. This seems to be engendering a feeling of hopelessness, insecurity and anger among these young males".

Accordingly, among other things, it may well be that in our correct interventions to empower women, we have inadvertently neglected to take the boy-child into consideration, and therefore given scant attention to this equally important sector of our communities. This obviously poses a challenge to all of us to ensure that we urgently address this matter.

Consequently, the traditional male/female relationships have been radically altered whereas some men in society have not kept pace with these necessary and inevitable changes.

Concomitant with that, persistently strong patriarchal attitudes, high levels of unemployment, the disintegration of communities and perceived disempowerment of males in our society, have created a false impression among significant sections of these South African men that they have, indeed, been emasculated. Of course, this is not an excuse for unacceptable and morally wrong behaviour of some of the men that I regard as deviant.

It is almost a subconscious holding on to power and dominance that results in this violence. The only power men have is their biological strength against women. To end all oppression we must end patriarchy. The idea that the subjugation of women by men came about as a result of either some biological factor, that women stayed at home and looked after children and men went out as hunters and gatherers, should be challenged by a social system where women enjoy a dominance precisely because they have a rare gift of reproduction, a gift that society needed to preserve because that was the only way that society would ensure its future. We have a lot to learn from those societies that had their priorities right, societies where women were protected and not violated. Where girl children held rich promise of a future and not raped and killed.

Given the above, I am convinced that it is critical that as we modernize our society and abandon archaic views, attitudes and beliefs, and empower women, as we have to, we need simultaneously, systematic and focussed programmes to take our boy-child and adult men along. This is important because the strides we have and continue to make would come to naught if the South African men, lag behind, or do not keep pace with the many progressive changes that we effect in order to end gender discrimination and empower women.

We have to find a way of balancing cultures that celebrate male masculinity with a celebration of the sanctity and rights of women because real men don't hurt women. A man who raises his hand to a woman has real deep seated feelings of insecurity. This we must teach our children. Real men don't beat women.

I also believe that children must be taught at a very early age the equality between girls and boys. Unless we create a new culture, we will continuously reproduce all the negatives of an old culture that no longer has a place in our society. We have to transform society to represent all the ideals we have fought for. The only thing that seems to be happening is that every August we celebrate Women's Month and pay lip service to the equality of women.

Finally, in everything that we do, we have to mobilise all our resources, ensure that men become active agents of change in this struggle, so that together, we defeat all forms of violence and abuse against women, and persist in our historical mission to create a South Africa that is free, democratic, non-sexist and non-racial.

I have heard your many calls. I have been humbled by your pleas. I have been moved by your arguments and I accept the challenge. I accept the responsibility and I accept the calling to service and duty.

I am committing myself to your call because, in the life of each one of us, there comes, at different times, crucial moments. Sometimes, they arrive without invitation, often without warning. Yet, nothing is more important than being alert and prepared to receive them with all your abilities.

These are the moments that mark our lives and compel us to surrender ourselves to the causes that we carry, always from the heart. I believe that this is one of those moments, and if you say so, I have no hesitation in receiving your request with open arms; consciously and completely prepared to devote body and soul to this cause. As we are aware, 23 years ago a new South Africa was born. That new South Africa gave us fundamental rights, and then enjoined us to fundamental obligations. No nation can survive without honouring both the rights that dignify it, and the obligations that support it. It is time for our movement to reiterate to South Africans a Revolution of Certainties.

A calm, sensible, responsive and deep revolution that we fought for and achieved in 1994. The revolution dreamed of by our founding fathers and that we, all South Africans carry in our hearts. To reclaim and take forward this Revolution, there is no other ethically legitimate way than returning to the values of those founding fathers. To the values of the Freedom Charter, our guiding principles as resonant today as on the day they were written. To the values of the struggle for freedom, equality and dignity, and to put those values at the service of the people in their daily lives.

Let it be clear: either we return to our roots as a party with all its monumental capital value, or we put at risk the very future of our nation, our people, and generations to come. If we do not give back to the ANC its moral credit, the socio-political structure of the country is going to be weakened like never before.

What do we want to be responsible for? For salvation, or downfall? Together we shall decide. For my part, I have already made my decision, and it is irrevocable: I am going to work so that those sacred foundations of the new South Africa will never be crushed by personal ambitions, by corruption, by meanness, or by arrangements made behind the backs of the People, for nefarious and treacherous purposes.

The alarm bells have sounded. They are too loud to ignore. We have heard them. We heard them when people from all communities made their voices clear to defend the principles of unity and reconciliation that founded this democracy. We heard them when our people spoke by withholding their votes last year. Oh yes! Those bells sounded as a clear warning that we must not be so arrogant that we forget who we are, or who put us here.

It is not to satisfy a handful of selfish people that our founding fathers bequeathed us a Freedom Charter whose purpose was, and continues to be: justice, equality, dignity and happiness for all. It is our duty to take those words and to give them concrete value, using them as a central guide. Knowing, as we should always, know, what our destiny is, and how to reach it. Make no mistake: The Freedom Charter should be something every South African can feel, touch, look at, and live by each and every day.

Sacred words are even more sacred when they are acted upon and lived, bringing fulfilment to people, so that we may meet the promise of 1994 to deliver a better life for all, a life of meaning and quality.

Yes, comrades and friends: we have the right to happiness and well-being, but for that we also have the responsibility to preserve it and to make it true in the daily lives of our people.

Today our obligation is to recover the honour of our party, and to build the glory of our country. And may that glory reach all South Africans, the daily lives of each of us, empowering our lives, lifting our hopes and fulfilling our dreams.

Just a few days ago we received the statistics that showed that 30 million of our people still live in poverty – that is enough to put any one into serious and permanent depression. After all that we have done, we still have such high figures of poverty! But we, who know the value of hope, of faith will not despair. We will, all of us, soldier on and help create the dream of a better life.

We will have to face and emerge victorious before the terrible enemies that today are hovering in our country, threatening to defeat us. Corruption without limits, arrogance, nepotism, loss of the sense of reality, impunity and hypocrisy. That is why I say that the time has come.

I invite you to fight together; shoulder to shoulder; to defeat these dark enemies - external and internal - that threaten to end our dignity; impoverish and stunt our quality of life, and threaten the future of our children.

It has been said that to dream of reigniting the spirit of the ANC of the past is a pipedream, that life has moved on. True, life will move on. But the teachings of great people do not die. I know this from the bible – great teachings do not die, they are meant to guide us at every different stage and we need to stop and think, but we don't have to think for very long, because our recourse is right here.

I thank you.