



MINISTRY

**HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY

**THEMBI SIMELANE, MP,
MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH
AFRICA**

**ON THE OCCASION OF
THE WINNIE MADIKIZELA-MANDELA LEGACY COMMEMORATIVE
LECTURE AND STATUE UNVEILING**

28 SEPTEMBER 2026

**CIVIC CENTRE, WINNIE MADIKIZELA-MANDELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY,
BIZANA**

Programme Director, Cllr Mehlomakhulu

Executive Mayor of Alfred Nzo District Municipality, Cllr Tsileng
Sobuthongo

Our host Mayor of Winnie-Madikizela Mandela Local Municipality, Cllr
Theodora Danisa

All councillors present here today,
Distinguished delegates,
The people of Alfred Nzo District,
Ladies and gentlemen

Good morning.

I feel deeply honored and privileged to have been invited to this special event that commemorates and celebrates the life and times of Mama Nomzamo Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

Thank you for inviting me and entrusting me with such an enormous task.

I am particularly delighted to be a part of this special event dedicated to celebrating the enduring legacy of a woman whose very name and image are synonymous with courage, resilience and defiance.

Let me start by thanking the thoughtful partnership between Winnie-Madikizela Mandela Local Municipality and the Alfred Nzo District Municipality for immortalizing the name and legacy of Winnie-Madikizela

Mandela through this lecture and the statue that would be unveiled later today.

That legacy, sheer courage and unmatched resilience is without a doubt, our collective inheritance, and our guiding compass as we navigate the path towards the reconstruction and redevelopment of our country.

The fact that this event itself is taking place in a local municipality that proudly bears the name 'Winnie Madikizela-Mandela' means that we are doing something right. It speaks to our continued commitment to honoring our heroes and heroines and preserving their legacy.

When we say that the Eastern Cape is the Home of Legends, we should also be able to identify who those legends are and tell their full stories.

I believe that this lecture is part of a deliberate programme to tell the stories of our legends, to preserve their history, celebrate their contribution and ensure that their legacy remains part of the South Africa's institutional memory and liberatory heritage.

It is important that we be the ones telling our own story. For far too long, we have watched and listened as our history has been narrated by others—often from a position of disdain, prejudice, and hostility.

As a result, our history has been distorted, selectively presented and riddled with inaccuracies.

This distortion is neither accidental nor the product of a simple misreading of facts. It is a calculated manipulation, an ideological tactic deployed to serve the political objectives of those who once declared people like Winnie Mandela enemies of the state.

That machinery has not disappeared. It remains intact, vicious, and very much alive.

They have not surrendered, and they are not capitulating.

That is why it matters that we reclaim the responsibility of telling our own story—truthfully, unapologetically and in our own voice.

It would be a grave error on our part, to allow these very characters to tell the story and champion the narrative about the legacy of Winnie Mandela.

The story of Winnie Mandela has written itself, it for us to jealously guard this beautifully self-written story.

Nomzamo Winifred Madikizela-Mandela was born here in Bizana. She's a daughter of the soil.

She studied social work and became one of the first Black Female social workers. Despite the struggles of black people to further studies during apartheid, because of her love for people and education she persevered. Her choice of qualification spoke of her deep love for people and communities.

She took leaf from the words of Che Guevara when he famously stated, "The true revolutionary is guided by a great feeling of love. It is impossible to think of a genuine revolutionary lacking this quality"

Winnie Mandela, she remained true to this choice and remained a social worker at heart. She was also where people needed her the most.

It was therefore not accidental that she would later be drawn into the struggle for liberation. She saw apartheid for what it was, a crime against humanity through the people she served as a social medical worker.

It dawned on her early on that she “either had to survive apartheid or perish with it” and she chose to survive. Not only for herself but for all of us.

Mama Winnie was not an ordinary person. She was a freedom fighter, a visionary, and a leader.

The apartheid regime labelled her a terrorist. It identified Mama Winnie as a target to be isolated and crushed—not because she was Nelson Mandela’s wife, but because she was a fierce opponent of apartheid in her own name and in her own right.

She led from the front when the women of this country in 1956 resisted and marched against the extension of pass laws to women.

When former President, Nelson Mandela was imprisoned, Mama Winnie continued with the fight against the apartheid regime. The arrest of her husband, young as she was, did not deter her. She kept the fire of the struggle for liberation burning.

Mama Winnie's fight against the oppression of black people came at a price.

She was imprisoned multiple times and in 1977 she was banished from her home in Soweto to a remote town in Brandfort in the Free State.

Mama Winnie's persecution was not incidental; it was part of a deliberate effort by the apartheid state to silence a woman who refused to surrender her voice, her activism or her commitment to the liberation of her people.

Mama Winnie knew her activism will most likely attract imprisonment. In fact, for political activists, the possibility of prison was an unavoidable consequence. Like many of compatriots, prison was not going to deter from fighting for our freedom or undermine her resolve for a democratic South Africa.

The apartheid regime had various forms of punishments for those it considered its mortal enemies. Punishments ranged from imprisonment, banishment, physical torture, forced exile and death itself. However the worst form of punishment, the regime had in its arsenal was solitary confinement.

Mama Winnie was in solitary confinement for 491 days in the period between 1969 and 1970. In her own words “solitary confinement was designed to kill you slowly that you were long dead before you died. By the time you died you were no body.”. The apartheid government attempted to break her but it failed. She triumphed and contributed significantly to the collapse of the inhumane system that was apartheid.

She fought for all of us to be free, she didn't turn down an opportunity to go further her studies abroad for women to be afraid to jog in the streets of Ekurhuleni and everywhere in country.

She didn't dedicate her life to struggle for the people of South Africa to be dastardly killed en masse while at family gatherings or recreational places.

First and foremost, Winnie Madikizela was a black woman in an apartheid South Africa.

She was oppressed because of her gender and skin colour. Being a woman in an apartheid South Africa for Mama Winnie meant constant harassment, discrimination, indignity, and exclusion.

In her own words Winnie Mandela described the nature of this harassment and indignity as follows:

"...that midnight knock when all about you is quiet. It means those blinding torches shone simultaneously through every window of your

house before the door is kicked open. It means the exclusive right the security branch have to read each and every letter in the house. It means paging through each and every book on your shelves, lifting carpets, looking under beds, lifting sleeping children from mattresses and looking under the sheets. It means tasting your sugar, your mealie meal and every spice on your kitchen shelf. Unpacking all your clothing and going through each pocket. Ultimately it means your seizure at dawn, dragged away from little children screaming and clinging to your skirt, imploring the white man dragging Mummy away to leave her alone.”

I am here today, and we are all here because Mama Winnie refused to be crushed by police harassment, persecution and acts that were designed to strip her of her God-given dignity.

Winnie Mandela did not only oppose and fight against apartheid, but she also helped to lay a foundation for our new order. Mama Winnie was part of the ANC women leaders who contributed to a document known as Constitutional Principles and Structures for a Democratic South Africa.

Through this document, women in the ANC demanded that the new Constitution should:

- I. guarantee equal rights for women and men in all spheres of public and private life;
- II. create mechanisms whereby the discrimination, disabilities and disadvantages to which women have been subjected are removed;
- III. give appropriate recognition to reproductive rights;
- IV. guarantee constitutional protection against sexual violence, abuse, harassment or defamation; and
- V. ensure that women are heard in all issues and participate actively in all levels of society.

Because of the posture and pressure from leaders such as Mama Winnie, the ANC NEC in 1990 declared that:

"the experience of other societies has shown that the emancipation of women is not a by-product of a struggle for democracy, national liberation or socialism. It has to be addressed in its own right within our organization, the mass democratic movement and in society as a whole."

I should pause and say that the progressive makeup of the ANC itself on issues of gender relations is not something that grew organically. This gender-sensitive outlook, which ultimately found its way into our constitution is a result of the work of women like Winnie Mandela.

It is for this reason that even though our democracy is relatively young compared to democracies around the world, our gender equity ratio is among the highest in the world.

Today, thanks to the struggles of women like Mama Winnie-Madikizela Mandela, women occupy strategic and leading positions in various sectors of our society.

Including the Judiciary. We have a fair representation of female judges in our various divisions of the High Court, including a fair representation of women in the highest court of the land, the Constitutional Court. As a matter of fact, the Chief Justice of this Country is a woman, Mandisa Maya.

On the academic side, women continue to lead as researchers and scholars, they also play a crucial role in governance structures such as senate and council. Mama Winnie would be proud that at least 10 universities are led by women as vice-chancellors.

At least 50% of cabinet ministers are women. These women are occupying strategic positions, shaping the future of our country.

This is a progressive milestone that would have made Mama Winnie satisfied with the progress of our struggle for gender equality.

We owe all of this to her sacrifice and the sacrifices of many of her contemporaries who paved a way for all of us.

Programme Director,

The progress we have made as a country continues to be undermined by the ugly scourge of gender-based violence. The abuse, assault and killing of women in our country have reached deeply disturbing and terrifying levels.

We extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of the women whose bodies were found in Ekurhuleni. We share in their grief and extend our deepest sympathies to all those who have been left to mourn the loss of their loved ones.

We extend our condolences to every family that has lost a daughter, sister, aunt, mother or friend at the hands of men.

Behind every statistic is a life, a family and a community forever changed by loss. We cannot accept a society in which women and girls live under the constant threat of violence.

Their lives mattered. Their families matter. And their memory must strengthen our resolve to end gender-based violence.

We agree with President Cyril Matamela Ramaphosa that “the unacceptably high levels of gender-based violence and femicide in South Africa are a blight on our national conscience, and a betrayal of our constitutional order for which so many fought, and for which so many gave their lives.”

This National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide can only be implemented with an active role from all of us, with municipalities equally playing their part.

For its part, government departments have rallied around the plan: and an amount of R1,6 billion has been sourced through budget reprioritisation. It is anchored by five key interventions to be implemented over the next six months:

- I. Urgently respond to victims and survivors of GBV.
- II. Broadening access to justice for survivors.
- III. Changing social norms and behaviour through high-level awareness raising and prevention campaigns.
- IV. Strengthening existing architecture and promoting accountability.
- V. The creation of more economic opportunities for women who are vulnerable to abuse because of poverty.

The President has directed all of us to work together to reclaim our society from the clutches of violence, homophobia, chauvinism and misogyny.

In heeding to the President's call, I have made a policy pronouncement to guide Human Settlements sector in responding to GBV. While we acknowledge the fiscal constraints which inhibit our ability to cater for every victim, we are committed to cater victims of gender-based violence as part of our Special Needs Policy. This Policy is being implemented in collaboration with the Department of Social Development. We must make tough, yet compassionate choices. This will ensure that qualifying survivors of gender-based violence—who are among our most vulnerable—are placed at the very front of the line to benefit from our housing programmes.

Notably, the General Household Survey 2022 indicates that **83.2% of South African households lived in formal dwellings** as of 2022. This statistic reflects the ongoing efforts to improve housing conditions and address the housing backlog in the country. The survey also highlights the progress made in terms of access to improved sanitation and other basic services, which are crucial for the well-being of households.

However, we should spare neither strength nor effort until the women and children of this country are safe—able to live, work and play in freedom, without the fear of abduction, rape or being killed.

Defeating the scourge of gender-based violence is the truest monument we can erect in honour of the sacrifices of Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela and the many others who gave so much for our freedom.

We must not betray their sacrifices by remaining silent, looking away or shielding those who perpetrate violence and abuse against women and children.

To honour their legacy is to act. To remember their sacrifice is to protect those who remain vulnerable. And to build the society they fought for, we must ensure that freedom is lived—not merely proclaimed—by every woman and every child in our country.

As government we call for a united community action against GBVF. May we join hands in unison in the fight against this scourge.

May the spirit of Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela propel us forward.

I thank you.