



**MINISTRY
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**REMARKS BY THE MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, MMAMOLOKO KUBAYI,
INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY, EASTERN CAPE, EAST LONDON, 08 MARCH
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Programme Director

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MEC of Eastern Cape Human Settlements, Siphokazi Lusithi

MEC of Free State COGTA Ketso Makume

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Director General of the Department of Human Settlements, Dr Alec Moemi

Chairpersons of Boards of Human Settlements Entities

CEOs of Human Settlements Entities

CEO of RB Property Group, Ms Mahadi Buthelezi

Distinguished Participants,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning

I would like to start with a quote from one of our giants on whose shoulders we stand on as strong pillars for women struggles, Mama Winnie Nomzamo Mandela, whom I believe all us men and women owe a great deal for the freedom we enjoy today. It is a quote that I believe captures the essence of the struggle for women's economic emancipation in the past 30 years of freedom. She said the following: *"The years of imprisonment hardened me... I no longer have the emotion of fear... There is no longer anything I can fear. There is nothing the government has not done to me. There isn't any pain I haven't known."*

This quote is also a reminder to all of us younger women that we must always pay respect to the women who sacrificed the prime of their youth and indeed most of their adult life to fight for our liberation. The women who made sure that in the struggle that was dominated by men, women's voices found expression and gender equality was at the centre of our struggle for freedom. They did not allow for women to be undermined, rendered invisible and overlooked by male chauvinism and gender prejudice and we dare not allow it. So, as we celebrate International Women's Day, we must pay homage to the giants of our struggle.

The reality is that women and girls all over the world face a multiplicity of challenges and foremost among these is gender inequality, which manifests itself in several ways. It manifests itself in the distribution of economic opportunities, division of labour in the household, in politics and many other spheres of life.

However, we must draw comfort from the knowledge that history has shown that wherever there has been an unjust distribution of power and resources, along race and gender lines, the victims of such an arrangement have always stood up to correct the imbalance. History has also shown that the struggle to correct such imbalances is not an easy journey, it is hard but not impossible to undertake and it is a journey worth taking. As Martin Luther King said "The long arch of history always bends towards justice".

I am certain that the many of the women who are in this room can attest to the difficulties and hardships of a woman's journey in a patriarchal world, more so in the patriarchal corporate and economic world. If they were to share their stories, these would be stories of the unfair expectations that are placed on women for them to be seen to be equal to men; stories of being overlooked for a leadership position because they were not men

enough to assume the position and being labelled emotional and aggressive when all they did was to demand to be treated equal.

To see the manifestation of gender inequality, you only have to look at the ever-elusive gender parity in the Boards of JSE-listed companies. After the 30 years of democracy, women representation in these Boards remains an appalling 35%. The construction sector is even worse - women comprise only 11% of the country's total construction workforce. This is largely because of stereotypes that continue to stigmatize the employment of women in the industry and persistent cultural bias that views construction as a "man's job"

I know as a matter of fact that the women who are here are those who have said to themselves that where there is injustice, they will not keep quiet but rather they will cause discomfort. These are women who are determined that for as long as they continue to breathe, patriarchy and gender inequality will not sit, walk or sleep comfortably. I also know that for many of us women who are here, it has not been an easy journey to get here. We all have our own unique stories of our hardships and the sacrifices we had to make to make it this far.

It is those unique experiences that each of us carry everywhere we go that have made us the women we are today. Our backgrounds and our experiences have built us to become the women who are "strong in will to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield" to bullying and chauvinism.

Today we join the United Nations in celebrating International Women's Day, under the theme "Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress". Support for women is of utmost importance. When I read this theme it reminded me of a book in the bible, the book of Ezekiel, Chapter 3, verse 17-19. In these verses, God is speaking to Ezekiel and it reads as follows:

"Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the people of Israel; so, hear the word I speak and give them warning from me. When I say to a wicked person, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn them or speak out to dissuade them from their evil ways in order to save their life, that wicked person will die for their sin, and I will hold you accountable

for their blood. But if you do warn the wicked person and they do not turn from their wickedness or from their evil ways, they will die for their sin; but you will have saved yourself.”

God was saying to prophet Ezekiel that because he has given him wisdom, Ezekiel had the privilege of being the watchman, which gave him the responsibility to share the wisdom with others, failing which God would hold him accountable. Simply put, with privilege comes with responsibility which must be held accountable.

Why do I find this interesting? The people of South Africa and my organization the ANC have given me and the Deputy Minister the privilege to lead the Department of Human Settlements and with this privilege comes responsibility. While I still serve in this position, I have a responsibility to empower and invest in you women of South Africa, for which you must hold me accountable. This year’s theme that says *Invest in women: accelerate progress* is a reminder of the responsibility I carry as the Executive authority in the Department of Human Settlements, that I must invest in women.

Accountability goes both ways. Those who get opportunities to prosper because of the investment we make as a Department, have a responsibility to grow the economy, create jobs and more importantly to empower other women. Similarly, we shall also hold you accountable to these responsibilities as we are held responsible to serve the Republic of South Africa.

We also extend gratitude to the task team comprising of various women who played a part towards ensuring today is a success. We can stand here proudly to say we are making progress resulting from those coordinated efforts. The reason we are gathered here today was to fulfill the promise I made to you at the Human Settlements Women Indaba and Exhibition, wherein I said we were going to meet on this day to give a report back on the undertakings we agreed upon at the Indaba. In other words, we are here to account to you as women in our sector on how far we have gone in implementing the promises we made.

The Indaba sought to promote opportunities for the socio-economic empowerment of women in the human settlements value chain, share good practice lessons of business

success from human settlements protégées, create an enabling environment for women to effect transformation, and build and strengthen sector partnerships to better harness resources. At the Indaba, clear resolutions were taken by the sector.

I believe that we are making good progress in the implementation of empowerment programmes such as the set asides, the training programmes and so on. Admittedly, a lot more needs to be done to get all provinces and municipalities to comply. However, we should celebrate the achievements we have made.

As we approach the end of the 6th administration, we ought to ask ourselves the question: what lessons have we learnt in the past 30 years, that will help to conceptualize doing things differently going forward?

I think we have reached a point where women have to stop only playing catch up to men in the sector. It's time we put together a framework for the production of women trailblazers by taking a lead on new value chains in the sector. We live in a world that is rapidly changing because of urbanization, climate change, economic circumstances and technological innovation. These societal shifts bring with them opportunities for discerning entrepreneurs to take a lead and become market leaders.

The caliber of women entrepreneurs who are present today and those that are absent fill me with a sense of optimism that any of them can become market leaders and dominate the new and emerging value chains. I believe that the social compact that we are going to sign today is going to serve as a foundation for the cooperation and collaboration that is going to define our relationship going forward. Today we are signing this social commitment on behalf of the South African government. It is a framework through which we can hold each other accountable, so that we can continuously improve how we do things going forward to increase the impact of programmes.

The struggle for women emancipation is one which we carry forward with pride. We shall not cower, we shall not yield, we shall continue to shake things up until the walls of patriarchy and gender inequality come crumbling down.

I thank you.

