



MINISTRY
HUMAN SETTLEMENTS
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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ADDRESS

BY

THEMBI SIMELANE

MINISTER OF HUMAN SETTLEMENTS, MP

**ON THE OCCASION OF
THE WOMEN IN HUMAN SETTLEMENT SECTOR DIALOGUE**

31 AUGUST 2026

**DESTINY EXCLUSIVE HOTEL&CONVENTION CENTRE, OR TAMBO,
GAUTENG**

Programme Director, Ms Philisiwe Mthethwa;
Deputy Minister of Human Settlements, Honourable Tandi Mahambehhlala;
Director-General of Human Settlements; Dr Alec Moemi
Senior leaders from Government, our Human Settlements Entities and the
property, construction and finance sectors;

Facilitators, panellists, professionals, entrepreneurs, beneficiaries and distinguished guests;

Good evening.

Seventeen days ago, at Freedom Park, we launched the Women of Human Settlements platform. We did so with a clear intention: to create a sector-wide space in which women do not gather only to be celebrated, but to shape policy, influence institutions, expand economic power and hold our sector accountable for progress.

Today's engagement carries that work forward. It has moved from policy direction to implementation; from targets to opportunity; from institutional programmes to the experiences of women whose businesses, careers and professional journeys have been affected by those programmes.

This is what the national theme, 'Empowered Women - Empower the Nation', asks of us. It asks us to honour the courage and contribution of women, but it also asks whether the systems we lead are creating safety, ownership, income, influence and a fair opportunity to succeed.

This afternoon, the sector examined the Human Settlements response to gender-based violence and femicide. That discussion builds on the policy direction announced on 14 August: qualifying survivors who face serious housing vulnerability should have access to a lawful, confidential and survivor-centred pathway for priority assessment and appropriate housing assistance.

Let me repeat the necessary distinction. This is not an automatic allocation of a house. It is a commitment to design a credible route through which vulnerability can be assessed, the appropriate form of support can be identified, responsibilities can be assigned and decisions can be taken lawfully and with dignity.

Human Settlements cannot deliver this alone. Social Development brings shelters, psychosocial services, case management and referral pathways. The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities carries a national coordination and monitoring responsibility. Provinces administer programmes. Municipalities understand land, services, and local conditions. Our Entities, civil society and sector partners bring additional capability.

The test is whether a survivor encounters a coordinated system rather than a maze of institutions. We must protect personal information, minimise repeated disclosure, avoid public labelling and ensure that every referral has an institution that receives it and an official responsible for acting on it.

Safety and economic power belong in the same conversation. Economic dependence can narrow a woman's choices. Secure tenure, a professional pathway, access to finance, a contract and a sustainable enterprise can enlarge them.

That is why the 40% set-aside for women must be visible in procurement planning, sourcing, awards, contract values, payments and performance reporting. It should not be treated as a slogan or an end-of-year calculation. It is one practical instrument through which public expenditure can widen participation in the economy.

But the target is not the whole transformation agenda. We must also ask whether women-owned businesses are able to enter the pipeline, comply, compete, receive payment on time, grow their capacity and return for larger opportunities. We must ask whether professional women are moving into technical authority, executive leadership, and boardrooms. We must ask whether women have ownership and influence across land, finance, construction, property management, regulation, research and innovation.

The Property Sector Code remains an important framework for that broader responsibility. Transformation must be reflected in ownership, management control, skills development, enterprise and supplier development, and the economic opportunities created across the sector.

Our sector is also changing how it builds. Innovative Building Technologies must help us improve speed, quality, sustainability, and resilience. Women cannot be spectators in that transition. The sector's 2% IBT deliverable must open opportunities for women as designers, researchers, manufacturers, contractors, inspectors, financiers, and entrepreneurs.

Innovation that changes materials but leaves ownership and opportunity unchanged is incomplete. We must deliberately connect new delivery methods to skills, accreditation, finance, project pipelines and market access for women.

Tonight, we will hear from our Human Settlements Entities about their empowerment programmes. I welcome those programmes, but we must be disciplined about what we measure.

Training is valuable, but it is not the final outcome. Mentorship matters, but it must lead somewhere. Registration, placement, and incubation are steps in a pathway. The real test is progression: the first contract; the first paid invoice; financial close; professional registration; a business that survives beyond one opportunity; a woman who can employ others and compete again.

The institutions in this room must therefore work as a connected system. A woman supported by one Entity should be able to access the next stage through another: training connected to registration; registration connected to finance; finance connected to a project; a project connected to reliable payment and sustainable growth.

We must identify the opportunity pipeline clearly and communicate it early enough for women to prepare. We must address the recurring barriers of finance, collateral, compliance, project packaging, delayed payment, market access and insufficient work experience. And we must report honestly on who progresses and who falls out of the pipeline.

The most important voices this evening will be those of the beneficiaries. Their stories help us see what an institutional report can hide: the distance between being invited into a programme and securing a real opportunity; the persistence required to navigate systems; and the difference that the right support, at the right time, can make.

We must listen to their achievements, but also to the obstacles that remain. Their experiences should help us improve programme design, coordination and accountability. Beneficiaries must never be used merely to decorate an event or validate an institution. Their voices must influence what the institution does next.

I therefore place four expectations before the Department, our Entities and sector partners:

- First, know the baseline. Use verified and comparable information so that we understand where women currently participate and where the gaps are.
- Second, make the opportunity pipeline visible. Women cannot prepare for opportunities that are announced too late or communicated only to those already inside the system.
- Third, measure progression and impact. Track the movement from training and support into contracts, finance, employment, professional advancement, ownership and sustainable enterprise growth.
- Fourth, act on barriers. Use procurement, finance, accreditation, supplier development, project packaging, contract management and payment systems to remove obstacles that our institutions have the power to change.

These expectations must enter our existing plans, governance structures and performance reporting. Women's Month may close tonight; the work cannot close with it.

In 1956, women marched against a system that attempted to limit their movement, dignity, and power. Seventy years later, our responsibility is to remove the barriers that still constrain women's safety, ownership, and economic participation.

Let this platform become a place where policy is tested against implementation; where institutions account for measurable progress; where industry accepts its transformation responsibilities; and where the experiences of women shape the next decision.

Let us build human settlements in which women hold not only the key to a home, but the authority to plan, finance, design, construct, regulate, own and lead the sector itself.

Empowered women empower the nation. Our task is to build institutions and an economy equal to that truth.

I thank you.