

**ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT, MRS. HAPPY JOYCE MASHAMBA,
AT THE EVENT OF THE WOMEN SECTION
MEETING AT NZHELELE, DZANANI COMMUNITY
HALL.**

26th August 2014

Programme Director;

**Sisters, mothers, working women and
housewives -**

Good morning and our sincere gratitude for this wonderful privilege to address you on this auspicious occasion of the celebration of the 60th Anniversary of the Women's Charter and the 20th Anniversary of our Democracy.

This year also marks the 60th Anniversary of the launch of the Federation of South African Women [FEDSAW], during which the Women's Charter was adopted. It is also the 58th Anniversary of the march of our gallant women to Pretoria, against the extension of the pass laws to African women. We are also celebrating the 102nd Anniversary of the governing party, the African National Congress.

Fellow South African, patriots, Comrades and friends, during the first century before the birth of Jesus Christ, one great Roman writer, Cicero, wisely observed that "Not to know what happened before one was born, is always to be a child."

Similarly, not to know what happened in the history of women's struggles, that led to the adoption of the Women's Charter and what happened in the history of the liberation struggle, for the democratic breakthrough in 1994, is to suffer under a serious historical limitation which can undermine our struggle to deepen and advance the implementation of the Women's Charter and our Democracy.

Dear Sisters, it is, on the contrary, true that our knowledge of the manner in which both the Women's Charter and our Democracy were struggled for, can only strengthen our commitment in ensuring that they are fully realized, convinced that we are on the right path and filled with confidence derived from the achievements of past generations, in their struggle for women's emancipation and national democracy.

Therefore, one could not agree more with Oliver Reginald Tambo, the Late President of the African National Congress that anniversaries such as these cannot be occasions for just remembering and celebrating the past. Whilst it is important to recall and reclaim our past, what is also important is that we must learn lessons from that past to inform our present actions as we plan and move to the future.

In other words, anniversaries must be occasions for reflection, during which we look to the past and see what ground has been covered, what victories we have achieved and what setbacks we have suffered in our endeavours and then, on the basis of such evaluation, we can strategize for our advance to the future.

My presentation will, accordingly, be as follows:

- A Brief History of the Women's Struggle leading up to the adoption of Women's Charter in 1954 and Beyond;
- Achievements and Challenges;
- The Way Forward.

However, before I proceed with my presentation, let me clarify one issue that may have surprised some of you. I started off by addressing you as "Dear Mothers, Women and Housewives" and not as Customary, as "Ladies".

Further, I have not really taken note of the fact that there may very well be businesswomen in our midst and obviously "Madams" amongst us. This is not by accident, and there are several reasons for this approach.

First, the Preamble to the Women's Charter reads:

“We, the women of South Africa, wives and mothers, working women and housewives, African, Indians (sic), European and Coloured, hereby declare our aim of striving for the removal of all laws, regulations, conventions and customs that discriminate against us as women, and that deprive us in any way of our inherent right to the advantages, responsibilities and opportunities that society offers to any one section of the population.”

Dear Sisters, this Preamble speaks for itself, and it clearly reflects the refrain in women’s struggles amongst black women in general and African women in particular, that we suffer ‘triple oppression as women, as blacks/Africans and as working women’.

Clearly, this statement or complaint would not be true of businesswomen and madams of any colour or national group, nor would it be true of women from the white national group.

Again, with regard to the Freedom Charter, the ideological anchor of our democracy, it is reported that “The three thousand delegates [2884 delegates by other accounts] who gathered at Kliptown [to adopt the Freedom Charter on June 25 and 26, 1995] were workers, peasants, intellectuals, women, youth and students of all races and colours”. Hence, one may justifiably conclude, the ANC’s consistent assertion that it is biased towards the working class and the poor.

Most importantly, the intention here is to focus on progress achieved and obstacles encountered by working class women [i.e. working women in the various industries in our Country, in the commercial farming areas, in the traditional communities, in the rural areas, in domestic working industry and in our homes as housewives] since the down of democracy. Working class women obviously form the majority of women in our Country.

This bias towards working class women in my presentation is an attempt to correct the general approach in assessing the progress that has been made since the democratic breakthrough in 1994. We invariably focus progress made with regard to women in business, in politics and the professions.

As we talk about gender transformation and women's liberation, we always ask: How many women are in management boards of public and private companies? How many women are in parliament; in provincial legislatures and in municipal councils? How many are in Cabinet? How many women own mines, factories, farms and transport companies? We do not inquire about the lot of the woman farm worker; woman garment worker; woman mine worker; woman domestic worker; woman peasant in traditional areas and, indeed, the housewife - the house-slave who gets no remuneration for her labour.

I think a biased approach towards the working class women can better tell us how much has been achieved and how still remains to be done to address the lot of women, the majority of women, that is.

One may ask here: Could it be that we, as business women and madams are complicit in the “triple oppression” of our fellow black sisters that we remain silent about their lot?

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE WOMEN STRUGGLE LEADING UP TO THE ADOPTION OF THE WOMEN’S CHARTER IN 1954 AND BEYOND

- In 1913, women of Waaihoek staged the first anti-pass campaign in Bloemfontein, which was preceded by a women’s delegation to the Governor-General with a petition of over 5000 signatures, protesting against permits which require women to prove ‘formal’ employment every month. It was characterized by militancy and commitment and was costly to the personal life of participants. It also set tone for latter anti-pass action.

- The second episode was the 1930 Potchefstroom women's protest against lodgers' permits.
- In February 1954, 700 New Brighton Township women in Port Elizabeth marched against residence permits demanding that the Manager of Native Affairs take them back. When he refused, 100 women burned their permits and declared that New Brighton women were no longer prepared to carry them.
- On the 17th April of that year [1954], the Founding Conference of FEDSAW adopted the Women's Charter which outlined the women's aspirations for national liberation, social emancipation and women's liberation.

- During 1955, 2000 women marched on Pretoria; 1000 protested in front of the Native Administration in Durban; and in Cape Town; hundreds of women marched in protest against permit regulations. Then Verwoerd announced that dompasses were to be issued to African women from January in 1956.
- The women responded in full measure, organizing themselves throughout the Country for a march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria - the citadel of the apartheid regime. All in all 20 000 participated in the march.

- Brief points to note about the women's struggle up to 1956. First, from the beginning, this was a non-racial struggle, with women of all races participating right from the 1913 anti-pass campaign in Bloemfontein to the historic 1956 march to the Union Buildings in Pretoria. The Federation of South African Women itself was a broad-based non-racial organization, the brain-child of Rocky Alexander, who drew in other women like Hilda Watts, Lillian Ngoyi, Hellen Joseph, and Amina Cachalia. Comrade Florence Mnumuzane, previously Florence Mhinga, from our Province, was the Secretary of the Federation of the Transvaal Women [FEDTRAW] and participated in the march to the Union Buildings in 1956.

- Second, it was non-elitist - a mass movement as evidenced by the fact that amongst the African leaders of FEDSAW, a large number were trade unionists, primarily from the clothing, textile, food and canning industries. These trade unionists contributed invaluable organizational skills and mobilizing techniques to the women's struggle.

- Third, it was a non-feminist struggle, linking right from the start with the national liberation movement, with both the African People's Organization and the newly formed ANC, the 1913 women's campaign in Bloemfontein. The 1954 Women's Charter states, for instance, that:

"We do not form a society separate from the men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both women and men.

As women, we share the problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to remove social evils and obstacles to progress”.

- Fourth, it was pro-working class and the poor, as witness the statement in the Women’s Charter that: “We, women have stood and will stand shoulder to shoulder with our menfolk in common struggle against poverty, race and class discrimination, the evils of the colour bar”. Further Women’s Charter states: “We women appeal to all progressive organizations, to members of the great National Liberatory Movements, to the trade unions, to the churches, educational and welfare organizations, to all progressive men and women who have the interests of the people at heart, to join with us in this great and noble endeavor”.

- Fifth, it was internationalist. For instance, the Women's Charter states as one of FEDSAW's aims:

"To co-operate with all other organizations that have similar aims in South Africa as well as throughout the World" and "To strive for permanent peace throughout the World".

- Sixth: last but not least, the women's struggle and the Women's Charter shared the same orientation and ideological thrust with the National Liberation Movement as witness to the identity of the principles underpinning both the Women's Charter and the Freedom Charter, Revolutionary.

ACHIEVEMENT AND CHALLENGES 60 YEARS OF THE WOMEN'S CHARTER OF 1954 AND TWENTY YEARS AFTER THE ADVENT OF DEMOCRACY IN SOUTH AFRICA

- Lillian Ngoyi, National Chair of FEDSAW, Secretary General of the ANCWL, was the First woman to be elected to the National Executive of the ANC. She led FEDSAW members in 1956 historic march to the Union Buildings. In 1953, she attended the World Congress of Mothers organized by the Women's International Democratic Federation. Accompanied by Dora Tamana as officials of FEDSAW delegates, Lillian Ngoyi visited England, Germany, Switzerland, Romania, China and the Soviet Union, where they met women leaders often engaged in revolutionary working class politics. As she traversed Europe, passing from London through the so-called Iron

Curtain to the Eastern Block, Lillian Ngoyi commented on the absence of racism and the potential benefits of communism. From 1962 till the end of her life in 1980, Lillian Ngoyi was under banning orders. Reflecting on her life in 1972, Lillian Ngoyi matter of factly observed:

“My mother firmly believed our tears shall be wiped in the next world. I believe we should start enjoying life now”.

Our successes in breaking down the walls of oppression; inequality and patriarchal and archaic values, is evident in the election of Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma as the African Union Commission Chairperson. This has indeed been a victory for women of the world and especially African women.

However, there is no cause for celebration in our accomplishments, when some of our sisters remain downtrodden. We cannot rest when women are still living in abject poverty; in fear of attack; in abusive relationships and other forms of exploitation.

Whereas the ANC-led government has put systems in place to protect the rights of women and whilst government is working tirelessly to advance the interests of especially women in business and cooperatives, we still need to join hands together in lifting one other up and taking our hopes and aspirations to higher heights.

We also cannot turn a blind eye to our sisters in other countries, who are still suffering and who are still engaged in the struggle for justice and human rights.

Let us spare a thought for the continued violations of basic rights of women by states, society, armed and unarmed groups, corporations, traditional structures, individual men and all those who hold power in unequal and patriarchal societies. This is a renewed call for Boko Haram to bring back our girls!

We also acknowledge the scourge of human trafficking and the thousands of young women and girls being abducted annually, world-wide and in especially in South Africa. Let us take a firm stance against this evil practice and where possible, let us expose the guilty parties and root out this scourge.

In closure my wish is that gatherings such as today's meeting will continue to strengthen the plight of women of Limpopo and to take the emancipation of women forward.

When we enter into dialogue about issues affecting our progress, we make greater strides in finding solutions.

Let us take these deliberations beyond women's month every year as sisters; as mothers and as working women.

Wa'thint abafazi wa'thint imbokodo!

I thank you!

Mayihlome!

Khanimambo!

Ke a leboga!

Ndolivhuwa!

Baie dankie!