

**ADDRESS BY THE MEC FOR SOCIAL
DEVELOPMENT, MRS. HAPPY JOYCE MASHAMBA,
AT THE EVENT OF THE NEHAWU WOMEN'S DAY
EVENT FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
STAFF, HEALTH AUDITORIUM, POLOKWANE.**

8th August 2014

Programme Director;

The HOD for Health, Dr. Siphosiso Kabane;

**The HOD for Social Development, Ms. Daisy
Mafubelu;**

NEHAWU management;

**Women of the Departments of Health and Social
Development;**

Comrades and Friends;

All protocol observed.

Wa tint' abafazi, wa tint' imbokodo!

What a sight it must have been, seeing thousands of women of all races and ages; some carrying the babies they were minding at the time; all peaceful and in a spirit of togetherness; marching on the Union Buildings....

The sight of thousands of women gathering peacefully, yet firmly, at the headquarters of the then South African government, to hand over thousands of signed petitions, struck fear in the hearts of the recipients thereof. In fact, they never even came out of their offices to acknowledge these brave women who came from all over the country to declare in one voice: "enough is enough".

These events of 9th August 1956 inspired a day and a month in which we celebrate the tenacity; the uniqueness and the fighting spirit of the women. As the women's charter of 17 April 1954, adopted in Johannesburg, states, and I quote:

“The level of civilization which any society has reached, can be measured by the degree of freedom its members enjoy.”

Programme Director

Every year during Women's Month, we place emphasis on women's rights in society and focus on what we have achieved as far as the true emancipation of women is concerned.

Let us then analyze this freedom alluded to in the Charter, that women of South Africa have acquired, since the birth of our democracy in 1994 and together with that, take stock of the level of South Africa's civilization.

To understand where we are today and also where we are going to, we first need to understand where we have come from. Indeed magnificent strides have been made in terms of the roles and position of women in South Africa, if you compare them to the dark days of apartheid, when an oppressive and unjust system was in place, to divide all South Africans along racial, cultural, social and religious lines. In those days, women of all races and cultures were certainly the most oppressed of all.

Women were not regarded as being able to run companies, own property or vote, to name but a few. Apart from the oppressive pass laws that tore families apart, women had to deal with raising children on their own, while men were working in mines, on farms and in cities far away from home. Women too, had to seek employment to keep food on the table. Women were regarded as cleaners, cooks, labourers and nothing more. In those times, while South African women were suffering the worst oppression imaginable, indeed women the world over were fighting the patriarchal system and were struggling for gender equality.

However, comrades and colleagues, there were many South African women who did not accept their fate and fought this oppressive system.

Some of them are still with us today and some have paid with their lives, to free their sisters and their daughters from injustice and inequality. They toiled endlessly to have their voices heard, refusing to back down on the grounds of being women and being the weaker sex. I am referring to the likes of Lillian Ngoyi, Ruth First, Francis Baard, Ida Mtwana, Fatima Meer, Winnie Madikizela Mandela, Amina Cachalia, Albertina Sisulu, Victoria Mxenge and many more. The list is long and is evident of women of many colours and religions, who did not accept an unjust and unfair system.

What message will those who fought - and even laid down their lives - for the freedom of the people and especially women in South Africa, have had for today's generation of women?

Women of today successfully manage a career and motherhood. They can chair a meeting in the boardroom and still care for their families when they get home. Women of today drive around in expensive cars; wear exotic shoes and clothes; run their own businesses and communicate with each other on cell phones and social media.

Women of today have 50% representation in cabinet and according to a recent announcement of Minister Lindiwe Sisulu, women-owned companies will receive 30% of all human settlements projects with a rand value of over 35 billion rand over the next five years.

How different this seems from the women of 1956, who had to walk for miles through cold and dust and who had to use word of mouth to coordinate and attend a mammoth event such as the historic women's march?

The message to the modern woman would have been she should never forget that others before her have fought for the freedom and constitutional rights she currently enjoys. She should therefore never forget her sisters who remain downtrodden. The struggle for women's emancipation is far from over. We can safely say that the freedoms we enjoy today, speak of a high level of civilization, there are still too many women who are not truly free. Indeed we now have freedom of movement, economic freedom and freedom of speech, to name but a few.

However, we cannot enjoy the fruits of freedom while masse of our sisters are still living in abject poverty; while too many are still receiving substandard wages; while too many are living in constant fear of abuse; while we cannot walk around freely at night without fear of attack and while many do not have the opportunities that should be bestowed upon a woman in today's day and age.

Comrades and friends

I wish to reiterate that **too many** of our sisters and our children are exposed to the worst kind of violence imaginable. Where we know of a woman being abused, we cannot keep quiet. We need to speak out and break this cycle of abuse.

We need to take a stand against crime and violence against our children and declare, like the women of 1956 that enough is enough!

Programme Director

In closure, allow me to say that our girl children are our future. Our actions today will shape them to be the women of tomorrow. We should instil in them the responsibilities that will ensure the continuation of true women's emancipation. While we must teach them how to take their rightful place in society, we should also be good role models of how a woman should conduct herself. As women, we don't want to take over the roles of men.

While we demand respect and equality in the workplace, we acknowledge our role as women in the house to be that of the nurturers and teachers. Women have the softer approach and therefore can lead with dignity. There is no need to bring a point across in a violent manner.

As progressive women and public servants, let us take the hands of our fallen sisters and help them on their feet. Let us join hands together across the cultural divide, which still seems to exist, as an unfortunate result of years of being separated.

Tomorrow, as we commemorate Women's Day, we should 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 our unequal and patriarchal societies.

Women of the Departments of Health and Social Development:

Forward with women's rights, forward!

Long live the fighting spirit of women, long live!

Bring back our girls!

Wa tint' abafazi, wa tint' imbokodo!

I thank you!

Mayihlome!

Khanimambo!

Ke a leboga!

Baie dankie!

Ndi a livhuwa!