



REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT CYRIL RAMAPHOSA ON WOMEN'S DAY

DENNIS NEL STADIUM, POFADDER, NORTHERN CAPE.

FRIDAY, 9 AUGUST 2024

Programme Directors,
Minister of Sport, Arts and Culture, Mr Gayton McKenzie,
Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Ms Sindisiwe Chikunga,
Ministers and Deputy Ministers,
Premier of the Northern Cape, Dr Zamani Saul
Executive Mayor of the Namakwa District Municipality, Cllr Mervin Cloete,
Members of Parliament,
MECs and MPLs,
Representatives of political parties,
Religious, traditional and community leaders,
Guests,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Fellow South Africans,

Goeie môre. Molweni. Sanibonani. Dumelang. Lotjhani. Avuxeni. Ndi Matsheloni.

Good Morning.

Today, I greet all the women of South Africa as your President.

I greet you also as a son born of a woman, as a brother to a sister, as a husband and as a father of daughters.

On this Women's Day, I pay tribute to South Africa's women.

They are the pillars of our communities. The anchor of the family. The backbone of our nation. Abafazi. Imbokodo.

Today we stand on the shoulders of giants. The wise, caring, loving, selfless women who raised us, who nurtured us and who led our country to freedom.

It is my honour to be here in Pofadder in the Khâi-Ma Local Municipality.

The Northern Cape is the birthplace of many women heroes of the liberation struggle. People like Mama Frances Baard, Mittah Seperepere, Tina Joemat-Pettersson and others.

The Namakwa District is known for its rich cultural history. It is home to the Nama people. This province is the home of our living legend Mama Katrina Esau, who is fighting to preserve the language and culture of the San people.

Today we remember all the women of this province and from across South Africa who have played their part in building our country.

We salute their resilience and their dignity.

Each year on Women's Day, we commemorate the historic march of more than 20,000 women to the Union Buildings on the 9th of August 1956 to protest against the extension of pass laws to women.

On that day, those courageous women, from across our country, stood in silence for 30 minutes. And then they sang:

Wathint'abafazi
Wathint'imbokodo,
Uza kufa!

[When] you strike the women,
You strike a rock
You will be crushed!

In the many years since then, this song has come to represent women's courage and strength.

Today, as we celebrate 30 years of freedom and democracy, we should take stock.

We should reflect on how far we have come. And we should deliberate on the challenges that stand in the way of the emancipation of South Africa's women.

To move forward, we must understand our past.

South Africa remains a highly unequal country.

Poverty still has the face of a black woman.

Black women are more likely to be unemployed, to be poor and to be unskilled.

Cultural norms and practices – many of these the product of colonialism and apartheid – continue to hold women back.

Apartheid broke up families. Men were recruited as migrant labourers, leaving women and children behind to fend for themselves.

Young girls were brought up for marriage. They did not go to school. They were confined to the home.

Over 30 years, through the struggles of women, we have done much to improve the status and circumstance of South African women.

We have built on the struggles of many decades.

This year marks 70 years since the historic Women's Charter was adopted.

It is 30 years since the adoption of the Women's Charter for Effective Equality.

These charters continue to guide our efforts.

As the Women's Charter demands, women now have the right to vote.

They have the right to equal work for equal pay.

They have the right to equality before the law.

And we have made great progress in providing for the protection of mother and child.

As the Women's Charter demands, we have worked to provide proper homes for all. But much is still to be done.

We have, to use the words of the Charter, worked to provide "water, light, transport, sanitation, and other amenities of modern civilisation".

Women in South Africa enjoy rights and freedoms under our Constitution. They benefit from progressive legislation.

Women today are significantly represented in Parliament, in government and in the judiciary.

Thanks to our affirmative action policies, there are today more women in important positions in the workforce. But more still needs to be done, especially in the private sector.

Women in South Africa enjoy the right to quality healthcare, including reproductive health care.

Millions of South African women are supported every month with social grants to enable them to care for their families and support their children.

South Africa has one of the highest rates of female literacy in our region.

There is parity between girls and boys in primary school enrolment.

Female learners achieve more bachelors passes. Young women make up the majority of students in higher education institutions.

We have prioritised women and youth in our public employment programmes.

Around 66 percent of participants in the Presidential Employment Stimulus are women.

Yet, we still have much further to go.

As the Government of National Unity, we are united across the political spectrum by our common commitment to improve the lives of South African women.

To grow our economy and accelerate development, women must take their rightful place as active participants in the economy.

Women must be business owners, producers, employers and employees.

To support this effort, in 2021 we launched the Women's Economic Assembly.

The Assembly aims to secure procurement opportunities for women-owned businesses in different industries.

Through the Women's Economic Empowerment Programme approximately 8,000 women have been trained to establish and manage businesses.

With funding from government and development finance institutions, we are increasing the support provided to women-owned enterprises.

We are working to ensure more women can own land, especially in rural areas.

This is so that they can farm and have assets they can use to build and grow businesses.

We are driving initiatives to improve the health outcomes of South African women.

This is part of our commitment as the chair of the Global Leaders Network for Women, Children and Adolescent Health.

Fellow South Africans,

As we celebrate the gains made during the 30 years of freedom and democracy, our country is deeply traumatised by violence against women and children.

This violence is a betrayal of our Constitution. It is an affront to our common humanity.

In recent years, we have worked together to fight gender-based violence and femicide.

Guided by our National Strategic Plan, we have introduced new laws that protect survivors of gender-based violence, improve the response of the police, and ensure harsher sentences for perpetrators.

We have opened additional Sexual Offences Courts. We have expanded our network of Thuthuzela Care Centres.

We have introduced more victim-friendly services at police stations across the country.

We have just recently passed legislation for the establishment of a Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Council to mobilise and coordinate work across society.

The Human Sciences Research Council has just completed the first-ever national survey on GBV prevalence in a democratic South Africa.

The results of this ground-breaking survey will help guide our response to gender-based violence.

The study was undertaken in 2022 based on a random sample of people interviewed at home.

It measured issues like physical, sexual, emotional and economic abuse, as well as controlling behaviour between intimate partners.

The detailed results of the survey will be released in the coming weeks.

Among other things, the survey found that around 7 percent of women aged 18 years and older had experienced physical or sexual violence in the past 12 months.

This rate was highest among young women, black women, women who completed secondary education, and women who are unmarried but live with a partner.

Seven percent may not sound like a lot.

But this figure is the equivalent of 1.5 million women.

So, according to the HSRC survey, over the course of just one year, more than one and a half million women experienced physical or sexual violence in our country.

That is more than the entire population of the Northern Cape.

These are not statistics. These are human beings.

These are women who have endured a trauma that no person should have to experience.

The survey highlights that physical violence starts early, often affecting adolescent girls and young women, and continues through adulthood.

Around 13 percent of women who had ever been in an intimate relationship reported that they had experienced economic abuse at the hands of their partner.

This is why we need to address the massive inequality in income between men and women.

On average, women earn a quarter of their income from grants, compared to a far lower percentage for men.

We must therefore create more jobs and other economic opportunities for women. So they are less vulnerable to exploitation and abuse.

Significantly, 4 percent of men in the survey reported having perpetrated physical violence against a women in the preceding 12 months.

This translates to over 600,000 men.

This makes clear what we all know.

Men must change their behaviour. Men must change their attitudes.

That is why we today we call on all South African men to make a pledge to be part of the solution. To take responsibility for their actions.

To never raise a hand against a women.

To treat women as equals. To respect their rights and to treat them with dignity.

If we are to end gender-based violence, we must work together as a society.

We must work together, both men and women, both young and old.

Fellow South Africans,

When we call South African women 'imbokodo', we use the term they chose to describe themselves.

The face of poverty in South Africa may be that of a woman.

But it is also the face of resilience. Of determination. Of achievement.

The current generation of imbokodo have been clear. They have said nothing about women without women.

The blood, sweat and tears of South African women secured our freedom.

And it is their labour, their toil and their sacrifice that is building our nation.

They are fighting not just for themselves.

They are fighting for the dignity, the rights and the wellbeing of us all.

As our mothers, our grandmothers, our great-grandmothers, our aunts, our sisters and our daughters, you are our heroes. We offer you our tribute.

We thank you for all you are doing to build our country.

I wish all women and all South Africans a blessed Women's Day.

I thank you.