



Province of the
EASTERN CAPE

OFFICE OF THE PREMIER

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Address by: Eastern Cape Premier, Ms Noxolo Kiviet

01 March 2011

- **Honourable Speaker and Deputy Speaker**
- **Members of the Executive Council**
- **Director-General and senior members of our administration**
- **Members of the Media**
- **Honoured guests**
- **Ladies and gentlemen**

As part of the womenfolk, I am quite honoured to have this opportunity to join in solidarity our worldwide community in launching a month-long programme commemorating the International Women's Day, observed globally on 08 March each year since 1911. The centenary of this day comes as we continue to battle in our respective societies with economic, political and social challenges that in 1908 compelled women to raise their voices and speak up demanding shorter working hours, better pay and voting rights. The 1910 international conference of women decision, recognised by the United Nations, to set aside a day to put pressure for women's demands remains pungently relevant even today as we have not yet reached a stage where we can say that social equity, justice, peace and development is accessible to all.

It is also worth remembering that this year in South Africa; we will be celebrating the 55th year anniversary of the 1956 women's march to the Union Building. Women from all over South Africa, representing all racial groups and classes descended on Pretoria in defiance of the apartheid regime oppression brought about by the extension of pass laws. On 09 August we shall honour them recognising their boldness in demonstrating their resentment of such laws. Our current state reflects triumph over adversity as true freedom, as expressed by our first democratically elected President, Nelson Mandela, "cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression". Sisatsho ukuba: "Wathinta abafazi, wathinta imbokotho. (you strike the woman, you strike a rock)"

Honourable Speaker, recognising the still prevalent inequalities as experienced in various forms globally, it stands to reason that the day also seeks to celebrate the many successes that have been registered in women's emancipation. As South Africans, we need to recognise and celebrate our progressive Constitution which through the Bill of Rights, a cornerstone of our democracy, enshrines the rights of all citizens and affirms values of human dignity, equality and freedom. It is through this Constitution that the African National Congress (ANC) led

Government, has since 1994, worked hard to ensure that the country's political, social, and economic landscape tallies with our founding core values and Constitutional imperatives.

Approaching the fourth term of the Democratic Government, through a process of honest self-evaluation in its 52nd National Conference, the ANC in 2007 resolved to establish a Women's Ministry. This was done, not because there had been no gains in this regard, but because of the need to put more emphasis on the needs and agenda of the vulnerable groups falling within the Special Programmes Unit (SPU) - that is people with disabilities, the elderly, women, youth and children. Having analysed the relevance our existing approach, its relevance, strategies and areas of focus on women matters we made alternative recommendations gravitating towards change of our Government institutions.

Consequently, the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities was established as a more focused machinery to address women emancipation and gender matters. Its stated mandate is to mainstream gender, disability, youth, elderly and children's rights into all programmes of Government and society. You will remember that as the Provincial Government last year, to follow the national trends, we reconfigured the

Social Development into a new Ministry - Social Development and Special Programmes. This was done with a view to set up a Provincial structure that would not only complement the national ministry but ensure localised implementation of the Government policy framework and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that these vulnerable groups benefit equally as the rest of the population.

Through compliance with international and regional protocols that South Africa is party to; the new department seeks to make meaningful through mainstreaming prioritising:

- interests of women, children and persons with disabilities in all development programmes in the country - coming to women, these need to be addressed urgently;
- emancipation of women in rural areas;
- development of the Gender Equality Bill (currently underway);
- achieving the country-targets with regard to gender equality; and
- curbing gender based violence particularly the rape and murder of women.

On this score we must remember the regrettable incidents in the North Eastern parts of this Province elderly women accused of witchcraft are murdered. This, definitely, is not a defining characteristic of a society that respects the rights of women and accords them dignity.

Ladies and gentlemen, you will have to agree with me that women should be playing a leading role in the developmental agenda of our society despite there being, in some areas, continued undermining of our efforts in advancing gender equality and women empowerment. What this means is that structures and systems set up to ensure the mainstreaming and social inclusion women should be strengthened. The Eastern Cape Socio Economic Consultative Council (ECSECC) reports that in the last decade (2000 – 2010), the number of women discouraged from seeking employment has been consistently higher than that of males. This happens despite there being Constitutional guarantees for impartial access to opportunities and our Government putting emphasis on women empowerment through legislation in the form of the 1998 Employment Equity Act as well as the inherent policy on Affirmative Action.

Structurally, South Africa is ready to implement drastic changes that recognise the significance of the values that led to the founding the International Women's Day. It is, however, attitudes of some individuals and communities that need to be subjected to some kind of reconstruction and development programme as they continue to set us back.

While, undoubtedly there is work to be done in this regard; it is appropriate that we acknowledge the many good things that have happened since the advent of democracy in 1994. Realisation of the democratic dispensation has meant that:

- more people than ever before have access to clean water and have electricity in their homes;
- more people have opportunities to improve their lives, to become educated and acquire skills joining quest of building a better South Africa;
- that the economy is growing progressively creating jobs, enabling us to reduce poverty;
- there is more access to housing, land and education;
- lastly
- services in clinics are improving and most importantly promoting interests of vulnerable groups.

The Eastern Cape developments specific to women's needs include the prevention of mother to child HIV transmission programme that is now rendered by all health care facilities in the Province. Secondly, new-born baby Nevirapine uptake has now reached 83.3%. Furthermore, the Province is addressing the increase in maternal and infant mortality rate by piloting a halfway house project for pregnant women from far flung areas at Taylor Bequest Hospital in Mt Fletcher.

Ladies and gentlemen, the status of women's employment continues to grow, despite there being a salient lack of progress in this Province when it comes to the number of female employers which stands at only two women for every 10 employers. It is also disturbing that women in high volume industries are under-represented in construction and transport industries accounting for a paltry 16%. We should then celebrate that in the last decade the number of women employed in construction increased nine-fold from 1 739 women in the first quarter of the year 2000 to 17 173 in 2010. As we seek to balance the gender equation at all levels of employment, more effort needs to be put in ensuring a broader spread of women in all industries preventing the current scenario where they are concentrated in employment in private

households at 79%, government at 62%, trade at 54% and finance at 53%.

It is the Executive Council's solemn view that with MEC Pemmy Majodina driving the ministry, emphasis shall be lent to Special Programmes at political level where she will encourage her colleagues to drive associated agenda. It should be noted that the role of the SPU offices had been denigrated to managing events commemorating special days and that is not their mandate. Their mandate is to ensure that SPU related policy programmes, as they affect various societal sectors, are implemented. We further hope that the recent SPU summit has given clarity on what the SPU staff, who lead programmes linked to women, should be doing and at what capacity level they should be operating in to take strategic decisions or make input at senior management level.

During the activities of this month, I am certain that we are going to drive a programme that begins to assert the role of the ministry in streamlining and coordination necessary to make the SPU more predictable and direct. We expect them to ensure that there is harmony on strategic decisions on issues of gender, monitoring and evaluation Government programmes to ensure that there is compliance.

Honourable Speaker, the ruling party's implementation of international, regional, national and provincial directives, strategies and policies when it comes to women's issues shows our determination to continue to be in solidarity with our international counterparts. It is our view that activities around the International Women's Day during the course of this month should be observed with a view of taking stock of the progress made in the struggle for the emancipation of the women of the world. Where this agenda is falling short or failing, remedial measures should be taken.

As I conclude Programme Director, I would like to urge SPUs in all departments to plan accordingly and come up with strategies that would lead to creation of employment opportunities for women. This would be honouring the theme ***“Transformation: Pathway to Decent work for Women”*** that flows from President Jacob Zuma's State of the Nation Address. SPUs failure to plan in this regard, as the old proverb says, will be planning to fail. Let us cascade the SPU function to the entire Eastern Cape Provincial Government. I am looking forward to the activities of this month and eager to lend support wherever needed. **Malibongwe, igama lamakosikazi.**

Ndiyabulela.