

**ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT JACOB ZUMA AT THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
COMMEMORATION EVENT, GALESHEWE, KIMBERLEY, NORTHERN CAPE  
PROVINCE  
09 AUGUST 2017**

The Premier of the Northern Cape,  
The Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women,  
The Minister of Arts and Culture,  
Ministers, Premiers, Deputy Ministers, MECs, MPs, MPLs, Councillors,  
Members of the diplomatic corps,  
Veterans of the liberation struggle,  
Fellow South Africans,

We greet you all on this important occasion in the calendar of our history as a nation.

We remember today the strength and determination of approximately twenty thousand women who marched fearlessly to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956 against government's attempt to force women to carry passes as part of influx control.

Women from as far afield as Cape Town and Port Elizabeth travelled to Pretoria to make their mark in raising their voice against injustice.

We pay a special tribute to these selfless freedom fighters for their tenacity, selflessness and foresight.

On this day we salute generations of women leaders, Charlotte Maxeke, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Sophie Williams-De Bruyn, Lillian Diedericks, Dorothy Nyembe, Albertina Sisulu, Ruth Mompati, Bertha Gxowa, Sister Bernard Ncube, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, and many others.

We also pay tribute to thousands of other women, whose names we do not even know, who suffered and fought for the freedom we enjoy today.

These patriots are an embodiment of 105 years of a relentless forward march to total emancipation, land rights, equality, justice and democracy.

Their sacrifices remind us that our freedom did not come about because of the generosity of any person, but through blood, sweat and tears.

Unarmed and defenceless, women challenged the might and brutality of successive oppressive regimes in order to ensure that future generations live in a free South Africa.

Last year we unveiled statues of the women leaders of the 1956 march in Tshwane. I am pleased to announce that Government will also erect a statue honouring mama Lillian Diedericks, who is one of the surviving leaders of the 1956 march.

On this occasion we also pay tribute to Mama Veronica Sobukwe, the wife of the Pan Africanist Congress leader Robert Sobukwe, who celebrated her 90th birthday years a few days ago.

Mama Sobukwe endured years of pain and suffering during her husband's years of struggle and detention by the apartheid regime, including after his eventual demise.

Compatriots,

We are marking National Women's Day under the theme; "The Year of OR Tambo: Women United in Moving South Africa Forward".

The event thus also celebrates the life of the former ANC President and one of the greatest sons and leaders of our country, Oliver Reginald Tambo. He would have turned 100 years old this year had he lived.

President Tambo was a leading proponent of women's emancipation within the liberation movement.

He consistently articulated the position that the oppression of women is linked with racial and class oppression. He urged women to be their own liberators and participate actively in the struggle against national oppression and also gender equality.

When we look back at the road travelled in the past 23 years, we are pleased with the progress that has been made at the level of socio-economic transformation.

Women are the primary beneficiaries of government's programmes aimed at fighting poverty.

Basic services such as water, electricity, housing, roads, access to education and health have been extended to more communities each year since 1994, with women being key beneficiaries. Women experience change directly when these services are provided by government in their communities.

We assure those who are still waiting that government will not rest until all communities, have water, electricity and other basic needs which improve the quality of life.

On further progress, the majority of social grants beneficiaries are women and children, extending social protection to fight poverty.

As part of promoting radical socio-economic transformation, government will also continue to prioritise women's access to economic opportunities and, in particular, to business financing and credit for women-owned SMMEs and cooperatives.

Through the Household Food and Nutrition Programme run by the Department of Social Development, government supports women-owned cooperatives through buying vegetables and other foodstuffs from women.

Over three hundred million rand worth of goods such as school uniforms, nutritious food and dignity packs were procured from local cooperatives operated by women in communities in the past year. Such programmes change the lives of women for the better in a direct way.

We urge all spheres of government to open up opportunities to more cooperatives and women-owned companies as they provide much-needed economic security for women.

Progress has also been made in the workplace, especially in the public sector. Women are increasingly occupying positions of authority and great responsibility, and occupy careers that were previously an exclusive preserve of men.

This year, amongst the country's achievements has been the appointment of the first female President of the Supreme Court of Appeal, Justice Mandisa Maya.

While we celebrate the advancement of women in the public sector, there is a continued exclusion of the majority of the population, both women and Africans, from decision-making positions in the private sector.

The statistics in the 2016-2017 Commission for Employment Equity Annual Report paints a bleak picture with regards to transformation.

White people occupy 68 percent of the positions at Top Management level and 58 percent at Senior Management levels.

Women continue to be under-represented at 22 percent and 33 percent at Top and Senior Management positions respectively.

What is of great concern is that, one also notices that women are struggling to enter the labour market even at lower levels due to lack of skills. As a result, they are forced to turn to the informal sector to make ends meet.

Government has taken a decision that we should go beyond lamenting to enforcing equality within the workplace.

The Department of Labour has been directed to enforce the provisions of the Employment Equity Act more vigorously, so that the much needed radical socio-economic transformation can be realized.

Compatriots,

While a lot of progress is being made in making South Africa a better place for women, the country faces a serious problem of violence and abuse directed towards women and girls.

The country has witnessed horrific incidents recently of the killing of women by men known to them such as intimate partners and also total strangers. Several children have also been attacked and killed.

These incidents have caused enormous pain and distress in the country.

The crimes against women take many forms - physical, sexual, economic, psychological and emotional, and they all represent a violation of human rights and dignity. The crimes include sexual offences, human trafficking, domestic violence and the criminal victimization of elderly women who are accused of witchcraft.

The police indicate that the biggest problem with the policing of these crimes is that they usually happen behind closed doors and in secluded areas where it is very difficult to police.

Another challenge is that victims have been known to withdraw cases in domestic violence and sexual offences where the offender is known to the victim.

In these cases families may intervene and reach an agreement among themselves to maintain a conspiracy of silence in exchange for money or some other financial benefit.

This conduct is unacceptable as it further perpetuates violence against women and turns such crimes into a matter that can be resolved through cash transactions benefitting families.

In other cases, the survivors prefer to keep quiet rather than speak out, due to the stigma attached to sexual abuse.

Other families have to confront the tragedy of human trafficking which is a painful and despicable crime that is tantamount to modern day slavery.

Young women and girls who are promised jobs or visits abroad and end up being forced into prostitution in hijacked buildings or brothels locally or in foreign countries.

We urge parents to take a keen interest in the activities of their children on social media and provide ongoing advice and support so that they can be protected.

Most are enticed to join the trafficking rings via social media.

Government is playing its part in fighting these crimes against women. South Africa must be safe for women and children in every corner. The South African Police Service has been directed to treat crimes against women and children as an apex priority.

There are currently more than a thousand designated victim empowerment rooms at police stations for purposes of enabling statements of the survivors of sexual offences, domestic violence, trafficking and other traumatised individuals to be taken in private.

Where there are no designated victim friendly rooms, alternative arrangements must be made for the taking of the statement in privacy.

There are specialised investigators called the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Investigative Units who investigate sexual offences, some family-related crimes and all child abuse crimes.

In addition the Directorate for Priority Crime Investigations or the Hawks investigate all cases of human trafficking and organised crime.

As a result of dedicated investigations a total of five hundred and forty one life sentences were achieved during the past financial year.

We wish to emphasise that nobody is above the law when it comes to crimes against women. All persons, regardless of position in society must face the full might of the law when they attack women and children.

We call for continued partnerships between government and civil society in promoting a society where women feel safe at all times.

Partnerships with traditional leaders, traditional healers, religious communities, schools and media houses will have a valuable impact in encouraging positive values which respect the rights of women.

Last year in the Limpopo, I launched a programme of National Dialogues on Violence Against Women and Children to mark the beginning of 16 days of activism of no Violence Against Women and Children.

These Dialogues will be taking place in all districts of the Northern Cape with effect from next week, to promote safer communities.

This is consistent with our commitment our commitment made in August 2016, which was to ensure that the whole country is in constant conversation on issues that affect us all.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Twenty thousand women marched for a better life and a life of dignity and justice for women in 1956.

Work continues to ensure that women have access to economic opportunities, basic services as well as safety and security in every community.

Work continues to ensure that every village has water, sanitation, electricity, good schools, clinics, land for farming and food production.

Government stands ready to work with women to ensure that the dividend of freedom and democracy can be enjoyed by women in the country, especially the poor and the working class.

On behalf of government, I wish all women in our country a productive and fruitful National Women's Day!

I thank you.