

SPEECH DELIVERED BY THE MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT, ENVIRONMENT AND TOURISM, MR J.L (JABU) MAHLANGU, MPL DURING A JOINT PARLIAMENT ON THE COMMONWEALTH DAY AND THE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY AT THE MPUMALANGA LEGISLATURE CHAMBER, RIVERSIDE, MBOMBELA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY.

Tuesday, 09 March 2010

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members;

We meet this morning, to celebrate both the *Commonwealth Day* and the *International Women's Day*. Given our history as a country and our struggle for the emancipation of our people, including empowering women, this day cannot therefore, pass unnoticed. We celebrate these two significant events, since they are based on entrenching democracy in the 54 member countries of the Commonwealth which includes South Africa; and also on celebrating our women. During March 8 every year, people around the Commonwealth get together to celebrate the special partnership of nations, their people and their ideals which make the Commonwealth unique.

On the same day, women of the world are celebrated and congratulated in recognition of their contribution in the political, economic and social spheres. As fearless warriors, women of this country unapologetically confronted the enemy and faced the barrel of his gun, when they descended on the oppressor's doorstep in 1956. We owe it to them to acknowledge and celebrate them, for their selfless contribution all over the world. They continue to keep our families intact – as a Setswana/Sesotho expression goes, '*ba tshwara thipa mo bogaleng*', despite its sharpness. This is an indication of their commitment to risk their lives, to ensure the safety and freedom of their families; their community and the rest of the world.

Honourable Speaker, Honourable Members, since the dawn of freedom and democracy in our country in 1994, the messages from the Commonwealth has ranged from ‘tolerance’ (1995); ‘working in partnership’ (1996); ‘Education - creating opportunity, realising potential’ (2005), amongst others. These messages were relevant then, and continue to offer hope for a better tomorrow. The focus for 2010 is on “Science, Technology and Society.” The message and the challenge being posed to all of us is that, we must use science and the opportunities being afforded by technology to improve our societies. This is because “science underpins economic and social progress, and that technology is fundamental to equitability and the implementation of democracy.” Seeking solutions to the plight of our people, for an example, has been made easier by the advent of telecommunications or even the world-wide-web (the internet).

As I close, ‘faith’ has always kept us moving forward during the dark days of oppression. It kept us moving forward in faith, that one day Nelson Mandela will be released from prison; that one day, all South Africans will be free and have equal rights and opportunities. As we pay tribute to the Women of South Africa and the world at large, we must continue to live up to the commitment we made in the *Freedom Charter*; that of ensuring “Equal Rights, Equal opportunities, which will result in **Progress for all.**”

German author Erik Erikson once said and I quote:

“Hope is both the earliest and the most indispensable virtue inherent in the state of being alive. If life is to be sustained, hope must remain, even where confidence is wounded, trust impaired.”

Ha khensa!