

SPEECH BY MEC FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND PLANNING, MR CNM PADAYACHEE DURING THE WOMEN'S GALA IN WITBANK

26 August 2008

Programme Director

Executive Mayor of Emalahleni, Ms Lina Malatji

Executive Mayor of Dr JS Moroka, Mr/s I Masombuka

Councillors

Representatives of organized business

Business Women and Representatives of various women organizations

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I am delighted to join you on this day and in these surroundings as women and mothers of South Africa continue to celebrate in this women's month.

I am delighted because this is indeed a special moment to share with the women who plays a pivotal role in the economic development of the province.

We meet here during a very significant month in the calendar of the country. August is a month which is dedicated to celebration of achievements of women in our midst. It is a month in which we share in the life and career experiences of our mothers. It is also a time during which we emphasise a message, same way as we do throughout the year though, that as a nation we must recommit to ensuring that a girl child grows up in an environment that recognises a role that she must play in the development of the country.

This month is very significant because on its own draws our attention to the real work that needs to be done if we are serious about steps that we take to ensure that we emancipate women from the shackles of poverty, unemployment and underdevelopment; it draws our attention to the real work that needs to be done if we are serious about steps that we need to take to ensure that the spectre of discrimination, patriarchal domination and hurdles to business opportunities are eradicated. It draws our attention to the maxim that **WE STILL NEED TO DO MORE.**

The Freedom Charter which was adopted in Kliptown on 26 June 1955 enjoins us to a common purpose of action on shared economic growth. We recall the Freedom Charter because it gives us a perspective on how we should distribute the economic wealth of the country. It says: "All the people shall share in the country's wealth."

To us this is neither a statement nor a principle. It is a foundation of the economic policy especially on issues of economic development and empowerment of all our people, especially women. We say this because we know, as the Charter guides us, that all the people must enjoy equal rights and be afforded an opportunity to make contribution to the economic wellbeing of the country and in our case that of this province. It is therefore important that the various skills that our people have, sheer determination that is shown by some of our young people and women are recognized through financial and non-financial support to ensure that indeed they too make a contribution to the economic development and growth of the province. We note that we are referring to all our people **NOT MEN ONLY**.

We are privileged because in our midst are great women who took the spear from the great generation of women of the 50's, the latter confidently told the apartheid government where to get off.

We are celebrating this women's month with pride because we know that as administration we were able to be influenced by women to make number of close judgements on policy issues especially on economic development.

The department took upon itself to ensure that the issue of economic empowerment is central to its economic development strategies.

We have established a directorate for Economic Empowerment which has ensured that today we recall the heroism of the legendary women like Lilian Ngoyi, Charlotte Manye-Maxeke, Madie Hall-Xuma, Cissy Gool, Ray Alexander Simons, Winifred Siqwana, Ida Mntwana, Dora Tamana and Annie Silinga to name but few who participated in the historic march to the Union Bulidling 52 years ago.

MEC Padayachee, in the 21st century, women enjoy more freedom and power than ever before. However, they are still disadvantaged when compared to men in virtually all aspects of life. It is no doubt that the economic empowerment of women can and will help reverse this unequal trend.

Increased income controlled by women gives them self confidence, which helps them to obtain a voice and vote in household decisions, economic decisions, fertility decisions, land use and conservation decisions.

One of my colleagues told me that women are often better economic stewards than men. She quoted research that shows that women are more likely to reinvest profits back to human capital than men. "Indeed women have economic power, they gain more equality and control over their own lives, while contributing directly to their children's development and thereby indirectly to their nation's income growth," she said.

We are here tonight to honour female achievers and encourage other females to participate vigorously in business initiatives and public service. As government we are committed to gender equity and empowerment by promoting women participation in the main stream economy. This event brings together female personalities from all the sectors and allows them an opportunity to share information. Networks and business linkages are central in the sustainability of small businesses. It is very important that events like this are used profitably so that when we go back at least we have achieved more.

MEC, as the Department will through this event like to achieve the following objectives:

- To create awareness to women on economic empowerment
- To create a platform for successful business women to share their business experiences with other women.
- To encourage women to participate in and contribute meaningfully to the first economy.
- To stimulate interactions and networking amongst business women in Mpumalanga
- To promote and instill the culture of entrepreneurship amongst women and youth in the province

I would like to urge you to make the best out of this event as it might be another occasion that could craft your path to success.

In the interim I would like to take you back so that we all share in a unique and instructive experience.

Imagine waking up in the morning, seeing 20 000 women marching to your office. Before they go home, they leave a bundle of petitions containing more than 100 000 signatures at the door to your office. What do you do? History will tell you what happened on that day, 9 August 1956.

That was the bravery of women who never shook during difficult times, 52 years ago.

The greatest Statesman of our time, President Nelson Mandela in recalling that historic day during one of the celebration of Women's Day said:

- As long as women are bound by poverty and as long as they are looked down upon, human rights will lack substance.
- As long as outmoded ways of thinking prevent women from making a meaningful contribution to society, progress will be slow.
- As long as the nation refuses to acknowledge the equal role of more than half of itself, it is doomed to failure.

During the opening of the democratically elected parliament on May 24 1994, Mr. Nelson Mandela also said: "Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression."

As a province we continue to engage in endeavors to ensure that we support empowerment of women, as we know that women play even bigger roles in their families and societies.

Their vigorous demand for freedom that reverberated both around the globe and across the ages cannot be in vain.

We, as such, owe it to them to recognize, learn from them and pay tribute to, their historic actions for that laid the foundation for the democracy we have achieved so far and the strides we have made in our determined march to gender equality.

The commemoration of that day brings historic memories to the struggle for human rights and the principle of non-racialism and non-sexism.

I would like to acknowledge the hosting of this gala dinner in the light of giving recognition to the role of women, mothers and girl children of this country.

All Power to Women!

As the province we need to reflect on the gains we have achieved and the challenges that still remain for us as we continue to build an equal and non-sexist society.

To give reflection on the sobering reality that South Africa remains a patriarchal society, in which oppression of women takes various and numerous forms, ranging from the crude to the seemingly innocuous.

The violence against women is just one among many harsh reminders of the challenges that still lie ahead. So too is the extent to which women are disproportionately affected by poverty, unemployment, disease and underdevelopment.

The message today therefore is that, women have the power to liberate themselves from economic dependence and patriarchy. Women are capable of succeeding in all spheres of life. Women must take their role as did many of you who are here today to celebrate your achievements in various positions of responsibility that you occupy in government, private sector and politics and communities. **Women should because they can.**

The department is in the process of finalizing the Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Strategy which aims to guide the implementation of economic empowerment in the province.

The strategy will ensure that the economic plight of women is given cognizance and that women become front runners in the mainstream economy since women have long been marginalized.

We have further established a Broad Based Black Economic Empowerment Advisory Committee and Forum, which seek to provide strategic advisory support to government in order to ensure that Economic Empowerment objectives are achieved.

The revised SMME strategy also reminds us to place women in the centre of economic development.

Amid these challenges, it is imperative to demonstrate a determination of ensuring that the struggle for the emancipation of women is set to deepen and intensify.

The strength of women in fighting poverty lies in them acting together. This was not the only case in 1956 in their pledge against the passbook, but women struggles in South Africa date back where they took a lead in the fight for land after the promulgation of the Land Act in 1913.

They define their role within the struggles of the South African society. They formed an organization, the Bantu Women's League, under the leadership of Charlotte Maxeke because of her deep understanding of the challenges facing women in South Africa. The League represented all the women of South Africa irrespective of class and education.

These women fought for their rights and the rights of all the oppressed people. It was during this time that the liberation movement came to realize that women were powerful allies and that they had a role in the fight against apartheid.

Society has always been motivated by strong women leaders even in the religious sphere from great women saints of history such as Joan of Arc, to women icons of modern societies, and in our own experience to the crucial role played by hundreds of thousands in the women's Manyanos, and the women saints of the struggle. But it has been an uphill battle against patriarchy.

Cedric Mayson writes: "The struggle for the emancipation of women needs to be fought on several fronts, including the sphere of religion".

The best tribute we can pay to these heroines is to defend the gains made and to change the lives of those who have yet to taste this freedom in real terms, the

majority of whom are the black, poor, rural and working class women existing on the periphery of society. I therefore enjoin each and every one of us here to hold hands and march in the struggle to liberate your sister, my mother, your daughter, my niece from our bigoted and patriarchal society.

In conclusion let me recite the noble words of Dr Nelson Mandela which I believe are still relevant today when he said:

.....in its short life, democratic South Africa has marked out significant milestones towards improving the status of women. For this we congratulate the women of South Africa: in government; in business; in trade union and community structures; in religious bodies; in women's organisations and elsewhere.

All of us should unite in support of women struggle for liberation to make sure that in reality "today is better than yesterday and tomorrow will be better than today. ***Malibongwe igama lamakhosikazi!***

Thank you very for your time.

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