

ADDRESS BY PRESIDENT JACOB ZUMA TO THE CELEBRATION OF NATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY,  
HARRY GWALA COMMUNITY CENTRE AND SPORTS GROUND,  
ZAMDELA, SASOLBURG, FREE STATE

[9 August 2015](#)

Deputy President Cyril Ramaphosa  
Minister in the Presidency for Women,  
Minister of Arts and Culture  
All Ministers, Premiers, Deputy Ministers, MECs, Mayors, Councilors,  
Leadership of ANC Women's League and of all women's organisations present,  
Veterans of the liberation struggle,  
The community at large  
Fellow South Africans,

Dumelang, molweni, goeie dag, sanibonani,

[Today](#) we mark 20 years since our country began celebrating National Women's Day.

This day was designated to celebrate the gallant contribution of South African women to the struggle for liberation and the attainment of the democracy we enjoy in our country.

National Women's Day also provides an opportunity to track the progress made in the advancement of women and in improving the quality of life of all women in our country, especially the poor and the working class.

[Today](#) we are celebrating the 59th Anniversary of the 1956 Women's March to the Union Buildings, under the theme: Women United in Moving Women's Agenda Forward.

We declared the year 2015 as the Year of the Freedom Charter and Unity in Action to Advance Socio-Economic Freedom. It is for this reason that [today](#) we are releasing the Report on the Status of Women in the South African Economy. The focus of Women's Day 2015 is thus the economic empowerment of women.

Compatriots,

The strides we have made as a country are attributable to endless sacrifices and the courageous spirit displayed by heroic stalwarts who paved the way.

We pay tribute to the stalwarts of our struggle, Charlotte Maxeke, Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Dorothy Nyembe, Albertina Sisulu, Ruth Mompati, Bertha Gxowa, Sister Bernard Ncube, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Sophie Williams-De Bruyn with whom we proudly share this occasion and many others.

These patriots are an embodiment of 102 years of a relentless forward march to total emancipation, land rights, equality, justice and democracy.

Their sacrifices remind us that our freedom came about 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 South Africa that truly belongs to all.

We also pay tribute to thousands of women, whose names we may never know, who suffered and fought for the freedom we enjoy [today](#).

I will mention just a few.

In March 1912, a petition signed by some 5 000 women in the Free State was sent to then whites-only regime Prime Minister Louis Botha asking for the repeal of the pass laws.

On 23 September 1913, a woman's march led by Charlotte Maxeke took place in the then Orange Free State, now Free State, against passes.

In October of the same year, the Transvaal Indian Women began defiance activities by hawking without licences in Vereeniging.

They crossed the Natal border and encouraged the Indian and black coal mine workers in New Castle to strike.

In 1918, women campaigned against beer halls, forcing many to close.

The anti-beer campaign gained momentum years later, in Cato Manor, Durban in [1959 led by Mary Thipe and Dorothy Nyembe](#).

[In 1918, Charlotte](#) Maxeke started the first formal women's organization, the Bantu Women's League of then South African Native National Congress.

This was the precursor to the ANC Women's League.

In 1954, the non-racial Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) was established which brought together women from the ANC, the South African Indian Congress, trade unions and self-help groups for the first time.

And then on [9 August 1956, FEDSAW organized some 20 000](#) women to the seat of government, the Union Buildings in Pretoria to present a petition against the carrying of passes by women to the then Prime Minister J.G Strydom.

The bravery of the women proved correct, the saying that women hold the knife on the sharp side when threatened - Mosadi u tshwara thipa kabugaleng.

They told Strydom:

wathint' abafazi,  
wathint' imbokodo,  
uzakufa!

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

This historic march will forever remain etched in the annals of the history of our country as major demonstration by women of their determination to crush apartheid colonialism.

The struggle continued.

In 1957 women in Zeerust revolted against passes in the villages of Dinokana, Lekgopung, and Motswedi. They refused to collect their passbooks from mobile units.

We also salute the women of Gopane village in Zeerust who organized a march against pass laws also in 1957.

Much earlier than that, women had already been playing a visible role in affairs of many clans. We can count women matriarchs like Mantantisi of the Batlokwa, Mkabayi ka Jama of amaZulu and Mantsopa of the Basotho.

Indeed, South African women gave their time and commitment to the liberation movement, often at a great personal cost, without any expectation of position or reward.

Fellow South Africans,

Lest we forget, the Freedom Charter whose 60th anniversary we celebrate this year, was preceded by the 1954 Women's Charter.

This is a clear indication that women were in their own rights pioneers in the struggle for liberation.

The Freedom Charter of 1955 together with the Women's Charter which informed the development of and influenced the 1994 Women's Charter for Effective Equality, influenced and anchored the fundamentals of the 1996 Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.

The Women's Charter called for the right to vote and be elected to all state bodies, equal pay for equal work, equal rights in relation to property, land rights, marriage and children and the removal of all laws and customs that denied women such equality among others.

A second Charter was drawn up through the National Women's Coalition structures, and was approved at the National Conference on 27 February 1994.

All South Africans voted as equals before the law for the first time in the historic general elections of 27 April 1994, thus bringing to a close decades of struggle. It has been quite a journey.

Compatriots,

Harsh, repressive laws entrenching white privilege suppressed women in many ways. To this day, black women in particular still suffer from that legacy.

We have learned a good lesson from the struggle for liberation that was led by the African National Congress.

That lesson is that without women working side by side with men, we will not become the prosperous nation envisaged by the Preamble of our Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996.

Also, if we are to succeed economically as a country, women must participate at both the micro and macro levels of the economy.

They must not be relegated to micro operations and the informal economy as has been the case.

Hence, from 1994, we had to embark on the empowerment of women, socially and economically.

Government reviewed and developed laws to promote the rights of women.

Significant progress has been made in areas such as legal status, attitudes, women's involvement in decision-making, especially at the political level, in employment, education, ownership of homes and businesses, the justice system, and economic participation.

Women representation in the National Assembly moved from a mere 2.7% pre 1994 to the current 41%.

More importantly, women lead us in Parliament with both the Speaker and the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces being women.

The representation of women in Cabinet following the 2014 general election stands at 43%, with deputy Ministers being at 45.9%.

The Local Government level is showing steady progress in the representation of women.

Following the 2011 Local Government Elections, the representation of women on Local Government Councils is at 38.4% compared to 28.2% in 2000.

Women constitute about 33% of all the judges in our judiciary. The judiciary had two white women in 1994. Now, in democracy, there are 61 women judges of which 48 are black women. Furthermore, we have two women Judge Presidents and a woman Deputy Judge President.

Women constitute about 41% of the total magistracy.

Women are also represented in the Judicial Service Commission and the Magistrates' Commission.

Women make up almost 40% of the Senior Management Service in the public service.

Diplomatic appointments of women have also equally increased dramatically. In 2001, only 8 women, constituting 17.4% of the total number, were serving as Heads of Missions abroad.

As of last year, women accounted for 29% of appointed Ambassadors, High Commissioners and Consul-Generals. There is still much room for improvement.

While the public sector continues to improve the status of women, the private sector still lags behind.

The Employment Equity Report indicates that in 2014, women still accounted for only 21% of top executive management positions and 32% of all senior management positions. Women appear to be stuck at both Middle and Junior management levels where they account for 45% and 43% respectively.

It would be good to have more women serving on the boards of directors of corporate South Africa.

Compatriots,

The Employment Equity Commission indicates that in spite of all the efforts, remnants of unfair discrimination still persist in a number of areas in our country, especially in the labour market.

Women are discriminated against on the basis of pregnancy or marital status. They are also subjected to pay inequality and sexual harassment. These must be addressed as all citizens are entitled to

equal treatment.

We also track the progress made by our youth especially young women who also need to enjoy the dividend of freedom.

During Youth Month we showcased the achievements of youth and introduced young women who are engineers, electricians, plumbers and businesswomen.

We also introduced young people who are excelling in energy, defence, business, science and technology.

This demonstrates that we are making steady progress in education. The future indeed looks bright as we have 99% of children aged 7- 15 years attending school. We thank South African parents for this achievement!

The attendance figures for our mass adult literacy programme, Kha Ri Gude (Let us Learn) also reaches a large number of women.

The report of the Commission on Higher Education (CHE) reveals that overall women are more successful in their studies. In 2007, 59% of graduates were women, although only 55.5% of all enrolled students were women.

At the universities of technology, 55% of graduates were women compared with 51% of enrolments.

“In the comprehensive universities 62% of graduates were women, while women made up only 57% of enrolments. And at the universities, 59% of graduates were women, compared to 56% of enrolments...

“In the education field more than 70% of the graduates are women; while in the human and social sciences, more than 60%”.

Compatriots,

In the area of health, we have a very good story to tell.

According to the 2014 mid-year population estimates released by Statistics South Africa, the life expectancy for women increased from 55.7 in 2002 to 63.1 in 2014 .

Our fight against HIV and AIDS has been among the important interventions that have improved the lives of our people.

The United Nations AIDS agency, (UNAIDS) announced on [14 July 2015](#), in a report How Aids Has Changed Everything - Meeting the MDG Targets, that the world has met and exceeded the AIDS targets of Millennium Development Goal (MDG) 6 and was on track to end the AIDS epidemic by 2030 as part of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The organisation further declared that the goal of 15 million people on life-saving HIV treatment by 2015 has been met and exceeded nine months ahead of schedule.

The report counted South Africa, as one of the countries that has made significant strides in halting and reversing the epidemic.

The report announced that South Africa has turned around its decline in life expectancy within [10 years, rising from 51 years in 2005 to 61 by the end of 2014, on](#) the back a massive increase in access to

antiretroviral (ARVs) therapy.

South Africa is also listed in the group of countries that have reduced the number of new HIV infections by at least 20 percent. In addition, of the 15 million people globally on HIV treatment, more than 3.4 million are in South Africa.

The report further announced that deaths associated with HIV and AIDS in South Africa have significantly declined by 58% since 2010 and life expectancy has increased from 52 years in 2005 to 61 years by 2014. Indeed our people are living longer and many are now able to work and live healthy lives due to the availability of treatment.

However these wonderful results as announced in the report should not blind us into complacency.

The fight against HIV and AIDS continues. The fight against the stigma and the support for all infected and affected by the virus should continue.

Siyajabula kakhulu ukuthi izwe lethu linconywe iNhlangoano yezizwe ngendlela esiqhuba ngalo uhlelo lokulwa nesifo sengculazi.

Abantu abaningi baphila kangcono manje negciwane ngoba lohulumeni kaKhongolose ubanika amaphilisi. Izingane zomama abanegciwane sezizalwa zingenalo igciwane eziningi ngoba omama abazithwele banikwa imishanguzo esindisa impilo yezingane.

Impilo isingcono kakhulu impela. Usizi lwemingcwabo izimpelasonto zonke seluphelile, bayaphila abantu abasebenzisa amaphilisi aphuma kuhulumeni. Uzoqhubeka uhulumeni ukwenza impilo ibengcono emikhakheni yonke.

Work also continues to improve patient care at our hospitals and clinics to ensure better services for women and children.

Fellow South Africans,

In June this year, our country hosted a very successful summit of the African Union under the theme "Women Empowerment and Development towards Agenda 2063".

Among many highlights, the Summit launched a major drive to support women in agriculture.

The Chairperson of the AU Commission gave each Head of State and government a new tiller as a symbol of the need to provide women access to modern technology, land, credit, and extension services in order to empower women in agriculture and agro industry.

The AU intervention is in line with our own programmes of promoting women in agriculture.

Government runs programmes such as Fetsa Tlala, providing women with seeds and implements.

Siyabahalalisela omama abalimayo abaxosha indlala ekhaya. Uhulumeni uzoqhubeka nohlelo lokubasiza ngezinsiza zokulima njengembewu, ogandaganda nokunye.

While counting achievements we also emphasise that the triple challenge of poverty, unemployment and inequality remains and women bear the brunt.

But we also note the positive impact the provision of a 'social wage' package has had in reducing poverty in the country.

This includes free primary health care, no-fee paying schools, social

grants -most notably old-age pensions and child support grants - the RDP housing and the provision of basic services to households, namely water, electricity and sanitation.

Through these services government cushions the poor from poverty and destitution.

The grants continue to be among the most effective poverty alleviation mechanisms of the democratic government.

They will continue to be so, given the difficult global economic situation. The economy is still not growing enough to create more jobs. Unemployment, poverty and inequality remain a stark reality.

We are therefore concerned about the talk of massive job cuts in the mining and steel sectors.

While we understand the economic pressure that some sectors are facing, we urge business to contain the difficulties as much as possible and not to resort to retrenchments at the first possible opportunity.

The retrenchments would have a huge negative impact on the social and economic landscape in the affected provinces and will affect scores of families and communities.

We trust that business and labour will engage fruitfully on this matter. Government stands ready to support and assist wherever possible.

Deputy President

Compatriots and friends

I am truly pleased to launch and release the Report on the Status of Women in the South African Economy [today](#).

The report identifies some of the areas where society broadly has been successful in enabling women's full participation in the economy, and others where there is a need for refocused efforts.

Let us use this report to benchmark and work harder to advance the status of women, especially the poor and the working class.

The march towards social and economic freedom for women continues. The democratic government will be part of that march until victory is attained.

Happy Women's Day to you all!

I thank you