



Remarks by Consul General P.N. Magaqa at the South African Women's Day Luncheon, Chicago 08 August 2008

Warm Greetings to all of you who have made the time to celebrate the South African National Women's Day with me in Chicago and to the many other people who will be observing this day from the shores of my country. Allow me on behalf of my Government to convey gratitude to the women of Chicago and the Midwest who never gave up the dream of a free and democratic South Africa.

On August 9th in 1956, thousands and thousands of heroic women of South Africa marched to Pretoria to force the Government to abolish the pass laws. We pay tribute to these heroines who have bestowed the gifts of life, courage and determination so we can continue to remember

We should constantly ask ourselves what more can we do to ensure that the empowerment and emancipation of women becomes a daily reality. I am ready to use this occasion to evaluate the progress of women empowerment in my country, South Africa and explore ways in which we can enhance the already achieved results and I invite all of you to join me in this journey.

The empowerment of women remains the collective responsibility of all who are prepared to make a commitment to end economic marginalisation and deprivation and eradicate the poverty that continues to defile our societies. The liberation of the world cannot be completed when a huge segment of our population is still confined to the margins of mainstream society because of disempowerment, illiteracy, poverty and lack of access to indispensable resources. If we fail to mobilise the potential of women to express their creativity and talent to complement that of men we are essentially depriving the world of the possibility of achieving the goals of growth, development and prosperity.

The struggle for gender equality is a struggle for freedom. Gender equality and women empowerment in South Africa did not come easy. It was characterised by struggles and sacrifices by women of all races who chose to unite and speak out against racism and sexism on 09 August 1956. To this day the emancipation and empowerment of women remains a challenge worldwide. The South African government has resolved to accord this matter the priority status it deserves. The people of my country year after year salute all our heroines who led by example and left us a legacy of the true meaning of courage, sacrifice and determination in pursuit of the noble goal of equality, freedom and justice for all.

My Government has pledged to uplift the status of women in our society and has chosen to adopt a multifocal approach to achieve this goal. We regard the MEN of our country as our main partners in the quest to achieve gender equality. We further believe that unless we educate men and socialise boys to rid them of the mentality of viewing themselves as superior to females, then our efforts to empower and emancipate women will remain a blurry vision. In this regard we value the importance of the family as the basic unit of society.

I am pleased to state that despite the existing challenges following fourteen (14) years of democracy in South Africa, our efforts of women empowerment are beginning to yield positive results.

Many women in our country have access to the economic opportunities that were previously available to a select segment of the overall population.

There continues to be a significant increase in the intake of women into the formal sectors of our economy and into leadership positions, particularly in the public sector where gender representation has improved significantly.

For example, the collective determination of government to recognise women as critical players in our country has resulted in 40 percent representation of women Cabinet.

Today women have access to social grants, housing, education, health care and free basic services among others. More than ever before, women enjoy rights and privileges and they are equally protected by our Constitution.

We have also made a conscious decision to integrate women's emancipation, empowerment, equality and poverty eradication in such initiatives as the Expanded Public Works Programme, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA) and our anti-poverty programme as a whole.

We continue to work with our social partners to promote the economic empowerment of women to have easy access to resources such as finance and ensure that we fast-track skills development at all levels. We have formed partnerships with women's organisations to address the challenges that are faced by women in the rural areas and those that are farm workers. This category of women is mostly vulnerable to mistreatment and abuse because the majority of them are not aware of their rights.

It is essential for the world to recognise and acknowledge the role that women play in production and economic activities. The key challenge for all of us is to transform these activities into economic growth and development and to ensure that the results benefit all women and children who are impoverished and disadvantaged.

It is abundantly clear especially in the African Continent that women are largely responsible for sustaining families through subsistence agriculture. According to the statistics of the U.S Agency for International Development (USAID) rural women are responsible for half of the world's food production and produce between 60% and 80% of food in most developing countries. Given the contribution of women to the Agricultural and other sectors world leaders must ensure that they are also represented in all major decision making processes.

I stand before you today as an advocate of women empowerment and gender equality and to attest to the fact that a stable and growing economy is a pre-condition for women empowerment. South Africa's drive to bring the long excluded majority of its people into the mainstream of its economic life is paying healthy dividends. It is pushing the growth rate on to a higher trajectory. It is helping fuel an economic and social revolution as millions start to enjoy disposable income and upward mobility for the first time. This is making South Africa an exciting place to do business and one that holds the promise of long-term stability.

South Africa is ranked as the 18th most attractive Foreign Direct Investment destination worldwide according to the AT Kearney 2007 Foreign Direct

Investment (FDI) Confidence Index. The report further lists the country as number nine (9) among the list of countries with the best investor protection and incentives mechanisms. International Analysts have placed it as the second stable country behind Mauritius. I now invite you to take advantage of all these positives and explore my country as an investment destination and the gateway to the growing Sub Saharan African economy.

With our macroeconomic balances in good shape, we have launched a massive 50 billion dollar capital expenditure program to improve our economic infrastructure, especially transport, energy and communications. This will provide increased economic opportunities for businesses and individuals. Government has also prioritised women as major stakeholders in this program.

For all the good news, it is no secret that we still face enormous challenges. As strongly as our economy has been performing, we have along way to increase growth and in particular development and empowerment of women. Government has taken a hard look at everything that has been done to get to where we are now and continues to engage the people in a dialogue to determine how best to work with them to achieve our development goals.

In the year 2008 the people of South Africa commemorate National Women's Day under the theme "Business Unusual: All power to Women". I therefore invite all of you who have congregated here today to join me and together let us gear our efforts to gender equality and women empowerment. Let us continue the legacy that gender activists have left for us and liberate the world.

THANK YOU!