

Remarks by the Minister of Home Affairs, Naledi Pandor MP, at the Methodist Church young women's event, Port Elizabeth, 4 May 2013

Programme Director

It gives me great pleasure to say a few words to you today.

Our post-apartheid democracy has advanced the rights and status of women in South Africa.

In school girls have equal access to boys and are performing at improved levels in many subjects. In higher education women are more than 50% of the student body, and while we all want to see more of them in scarce disciplines we are proud of their progress.

In clinics and hospitals women receive greater support from government than ever before. Access to free health services for pregnant women was a significant endorsement of the progressive ambitions of the Freedom Charter.

The blight of the HIV and AIDS pandemic has eroded some of our advances and women are bearing an oppressive burden in this regard. Infant mortality and women's mortality during childbirth are also challenges we must attend to.

In the political sphere and other public institutions our democracy has achieved world wide praise for our notable advances. Our cabinet and legislatures are

among the top ten most representative Parliaments of the world.

We are all potential beneficiaries and guardians of the Bill of Rights in our constitution.

One of our more intractable tasks in this regard is ensuring that all women, whatever their status and location, enjoy full access to those rights.

This task makes our priority of rural development immensely important for women. Millions of women in rural communities bear the brunt of poverty and oppression that is rooted in a patriarchal culture and tradition.

We need to uphold the right to culture, while firmly indicating that the right to culture and other traditional norms and practices have a companion called equality that must be respected.

The evidence of continuing gender inequality in the public and private sectors, in the domestic spaces we occupy, and in some of our key institutions of governance clearly indicates that a great deal more has to be done in South Africa to ensure that women practically feel safe and respected as equal citizens of our country.

Our Parliament, legislatures, municipalities, our courts must protect and empower women.

Much more needs to be done to ensure that the socialization of males and females inculcates respect for the human dignity of all.

Violence against women, rape, murder and other physical and verbal and psychological evils that women experience daily mean that we should strive to ensure that a safer caring society includes a concerted focus on women's safety and protection.

Our Constitution contains these protections already. We must make them a lived reality through the laws we pass and the programmes and budgets we support.

In fact, it is in the public service that we continue to see progressive change for women. The social sphere of our homes, our recreation places and our social clubs needs increased attention to ensure that women and girls benefit from democracy.

Any society that advocates radical democratic transformation (as we have done) takes on the important duty of ensuring increased human security for all who live in it.

We have done a great deal in South Africa, but the pain of disappearing children, sexual abuse of babies, and the limited protection our courts afford against domestic violence (protection orders) all point to the need to devote much more attention to women's equality.

Whether direct or indirect, discrimination against women is one of the most destructive forces in the world. We know that it is one of the major causes of poverty and suffering experienced by women all over the world.

For us to be able to deliver a fatal blow to domestic violence, we need to destroy the foundations of domestic violence.

And the best way to do that is to consolidate solidarity among women.

We read each day about women who are killed by their spouses and partners.

Domestic violence cannot be trivialized. It is a sign of societal decay, which is why it is a human rights issue.

The record of the past 19 years suggests that with focus and effective strategizing we can build on the advances we have made.

These advances have enabled women to make better lives for themselves through grasping new opportunities.

Over the last thirty years there have been fundamental changes in occupational structure, in qualifications, and in skills required in different economic sectors.

The overall pattern is for upskilling or an increase in “skill intensity”, especially in managerial, professional, and associate professional occupations.

In fact, gender equality is easier to achieve now in a post-industrial economy than in the past in an industrial economy.

Industrial occupational structures were divided into “male jobs” and “female jobs” with those professions requiring technical skills being largely the preserve of males.

However, with the growing importance of knowledge-based occupations - the legions of lawyers, doctors, and managerial professionals - women find it easier to fit in.

The services industry is a case in point, where we see more women entering the management professions and occupying high-level positions.

Today, South Africa has achieved a level of gender equality - in no small measure shaped by our constitution - that has only been accomplished in other countries after many decades of democracy.

For the first time we have a critical mass of women in Parliament. For the first time, we have women leading universities. And for the first time we have women as business executives in South Africa.

But there is so much more to do. What is the point of having better educated women if we find our aspirations blocked and talents short-changed in the world of work. We saw that men got better jobs when they were better qualified. So why didn't that happen to us when we got better qualified?

I think it has something – a little something - to do with leadership.

You'll excuse me for a moment if I make some broad-brush generalizations about the qualities that are associated with male and female leaders.

Leadership qualities such as aggressiveness, assertiveness, and competitiveness are traditionally associated with male leaders.

When women show these characteristics in the traditional corporate world they are called unwomanly. Choose one of the few women at the top in the corporate world – Maria Ramos, Cynthia Carroll – and I'm sure they will be able to tell you some stories.

In fact, many of these women executives were promoted because they were even more competitive and assertive than their male counterparts.

These successful women executives often juggled a family and a career - which their male counterparts often didn't have to do.

I'm not sure that you can talk about a women's management style, but it would be silly to deny that men and women are socialized differently. We are. And it is hardly surprising that these dispositions are reflected in the way conflict is resolved or risk pursued.

When an organization or a country faces an uncertain future, employees and citizens look for strong and decisive leadership.

Let me conclude with this. Female CEOs are still very rare, women are the minority in engineering and hard-

science fields, and there is still a gender pay gap. But remember. Women make up more than half the workforce and women are better than men at earning degrees. Let's make these two facts work for women.

I thank you.