

**Minister of Public Works
Ms S Sigcau
8 Decemver 2001**

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Opening of the Sandile Sawmill

Master of Ceremonies
Distinguished guests
Ladies and gentlemen

It is indeed a pleasure to be here with you today, on an occasion marking growth and development in a traditionally rural area.

The opening of Sandile Sawmill is not something that came about by the flick of a magic wand. As we have heard, hard work and dedication has gone into the establishment of this enterprise. Already more than 100 jobs have been created which include 22 for women and there will be more. It is also important that on all these jobs, the incumbents are trained and empowered - allow me to congratulate you on this achievement.

The people of Stutterheim have a proud history of resistance against colonialism and apartheid. The new millennium requires of us to unleash our potential and resourcefulness to conquer poverty. Let us unite in action for change to respond adequately to this developmental challenge.

A great amount of networking has been required and will continue to be required, especially as one of the main constraints in the area seems to be the mobility restrictions due to under- and undeveloped road networks.

I have been told of the unfortunate overturn that Mr Moses Qomoyi recently had with his vehicle on these roads, but luckily his injuries allow him to join us today - I am happy to see you Moses!

Your provincial Public Works has already provided at least R5,3 million for forest roads in this area. I am sure that you know that your contribution to the alleviation of poverty, the creation of jobs and accompanying developments are being recognised.

The national Department of Public Works is not primarily responsible for roads. We do assist in some access roads within the rural areas, specifically where we are creating new infrastructure to serve communities, in order to render these facilities accessible to the community members. In the main, you will have to continue your liaison with the provincial department of works and transport, through the necessary forums, to ensure that local needs are attended to.

I do want to believe that we all want our country, our community and our family to prosper in order for us to be assured of a life with dignity. But there are many issues that we need to address collectively as government and people, as parents and adults, as children, women, wives, teachers, care givers and concerned citizens.

One of these is the question of HIV/AIDS - a pandemic that at times seem far removed from ourselves, yet we are part and parcel of a society which needs to care and offer what support it can to the victims. We all need to take up the campaign of enlightening those who still believe that there is no such threat.

Ladies and gentlemen, apart from the immense physical suffering of the patients and the mental effect on their relatives, it also becomes a disease that destroys our financial and economic growth. While it is mostly the poorest of poor who bear the brunt of this pandemic, it would be a fallacy to say that it is confined only to them - this disease cuts across the spectrum.

It is therefore essential that all places of work, in all industries, should join hands with government in the campaign to improve awareness and prevention of the further spreading of this pandemic. We should be implementing policies and programmes that address the coping mechanisms of the patients both in the work situation and in the broader life, as well as that of their support systems and networks. The eradication of poverty is an integral part of our strategy to fight HIV/AIDS.

The HIV/AIDS pandemic affects women in very particular ways - and it means women and men should respond in a united manner to this crisis.

Some of the reasons why HIV/AIDS impacts particularly heavily on the lives of women include that:

- Women are at greater risk of HIV infection through sexual intercourse
- Women are more exposed to rape and sexual violence
- Women form the majority of South Africa's poor - poverty, poor nutrition and exposure to disease are major contributing factors in the development of AIDS related illnesses
- The transmission of the HIV virus from mother to child during pregnancy, at birth and through breast feeding have profound implications for the care, treatment and behaviour of pregnant women
- Women tend to shoulder greater responsibility for the care of children, the aged and sick within a family and a community. They are therefore being required to commit more of their energy, time and resources to care giving
- The under-representation of women in the economy means that women have less access to health care and other resources needed to treat AIDS related illnesses.

Some of the areas around which women and men should unite to fight HIV/AIDS include:

- The empowerment of women to take decisions about their own sexual health, by fighting gender inequality and educating women about the options available to them, including abstinence, faithfulness to a single partner and the use of male or female condoms
- Encouraging safer sexual practices in society. As the primary care givers to children, women can have a significant impact on sexual behaviour and awareness among young people
- Working with men to fight rape and sexual violence in society
- Encouraging people to take greater responsibility for their own health by going for voluntary HIV testing and counselling
- Promote the economic empowerment and education of South African women to address material inequality in society, access to health care and other resources - and generally enable women to assume greater control over their lives
- Form a visible, vocal and substantial part of a vigorous national programme of action to combat AIDS
- Dispel the myth that having sex with virgins cures AIDS
- Not to discriminate against people living with HIV/AIDS.

South African women have before demonstrated their capacity to bring about dramatic change, not only for women, but for society as a whole. South African women need to unite and use their collective strength in leading the fight against AIDS.

Make sure that you inform yourselves of the various government programmes and support provided at different levels.

As a nation we are also fighting the criminal elements in our society. Theft, armed robberies, abuse of children, women and the aged are but a few of the misdemeanors that we are trying to eradicate. My appeal is to every individual that we should take a firm stand not to protect any perpetrator of crime but that we should talk, report and identify these people - because they are a threat to our livelihoods. Please observe the campaign against the abuse of and violence against women and children. If we instill the right values and at the same time live out the example of being responsible citizens, we will contribute to the empowerment of our people, to sustained and growing economic development that can assist in the struggle against poverty.

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