

**Minister of Public Works
Ms Stella Sigcau
9 August 2001**

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National Women's Day Celebrations

Master of Ceremonies, Lizzy Ramncwana
Premier of the Eastern Cape, Rev Arnold Stofile
The Mayor, Councillor Faku
Ms Khanyi Mlambo
Officials
Distinguished guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

Today we are celebrating August 9th, Women's Day in South Africa. It is a public holiday precisely because the continuous struggle to liberate women is a national challenge.

I invite you to pause for a moment and reflect on the historical significance of this day. South African freedom fighters recognised that the struggle for the emancipation of women is an integral part of national liberation. The consequences of apartheid colonialism and patriarchy burdened women with triple exploitation. Essentially women were oppressed as women, as blacks and as employees.

Progressive democrats fought side by side with women for the emancipation of women. Women have been in the forefront of the struggle for national and social emancipation.

Outstanding women such as Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Ruth First, and many unsung heroines, have left an indelible imprint on our struggle for freedom. We all remember the words they sang on 9 August 1956 on the march against the then pass laws: "*Wathint abafazi, wathint imbokodo. Uzokufa*". Our presence here today signifies our resolve to emulate their service to the nation.

The post apartheid democratisation ushered in by the 27 April 1994 democratic breakthrough has invigorated the women's struggle for genuine equality.

Under the leadership of former president Mandela, women were included in the executive and legislative bodies to drive transformation. President Mbeki has deepened the transformation programme by involving even more women in his administration. Currently 30% of Members of Parliament; 24% of Cabinet Ministers and more than half of the Deputy Ministers are women. Furthermore, the Commission on Gender Equality, a Parliamentary Committee on the Quality of Life and Status of Women and the Office on the Status of Women in the Office of the President have been created.

Political equality has opened new frontiers of struggle. The struggle for gender equality and economic emancipation has become a focal point. Let us recall some of the milestones we have already accomplished:

Our democratic constitution espouses explicit values, which include:

- Human dignity, the achievement of equality and the advancement of human rights and freedoms.
- Non-racialism and non-sexism.

We have various specific pieces of legislation that seek to give meaning to equality, with equality between women and men being identified as one of the key objectives. These include:

- The promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act, No.4 of 2000.
- The Employment Equity Act, No.55 of 1998.
- The Preferential Procurement Policy Act, No. 5 of 2000.
- The Commission on Gender Equality Act, No.39 of 1996.

Reporting on the recent mid-year Cabinet Lekgotla, President Mbeki indicated that he was pleased " ... that this review showed that progress has been made in all areas of work. Including rural development, urban renewal, water and sanitation, skills development, higher rates of economic growth, black economic empowerment, the restructuring of state assets and the African Renaissance."

"Having carried out a comprehensive review of work done to implement our programmes, the Cabinet lekgotla confirmed the obligation for the Government to persist in the struggle for a better life for all. It emphasized the need to ensure the success of our people's efforts to build a new South Africa that is nonracial, nonsexist, peaceful and prosperous. The Cabinet emphasized the need for us to build a spirit of initiative and self-reliance among our people." (*Sowetan, Monday July 30 2001, p13.*)

While these are broad, national milestones achieved, allow me to share with you some contributions by the National Department of Public Works in the advancement of women.

My department has been actively involved in conceptualising and implementing policies and programmes to eradicate the skewed ownership patterns, along racial and gender lines in the construction industry, arising from the abolished system of apartheid.

While it is clear that all aspects of the policies and programmes are intended to be equally open to men and women, they do not necessarily end up in practices addressing the particular factors that cause women to remain in the periphery of the mainstream construction industry. It may be easy to remove laws that obstruct women's emancipation, but more difficult to remove prejudices of patriarchy.

Up to now, in engineering and construction contracts of a value of less than R2 million, the DPW has been targeting businesses with women equity and has provided a variable direct preference to such businesses in proportion to the percentage of women equity.

Since the introduction of these policies and programmes, there has been a marginal increase in the number of women participating in the mainstream construction activities. On our ECDP database, out of a current total of emerging contractors of 2 747 we have 260 women. When we compare these figures to the situation at the end of 1999, where out of a total of 1 698 emerging contractors, 236 were women, we see that whereas the database has grown by more than a thousand, the number of women business enterprises on the database has only grown by 24. As one other example, in our Port Elizabeth office alone, only R 2,7 million out of the R22 million unplanned maintenance contract allocations over the last two years had been awarded to women business enterprises. It is a clear indication that further stimulus should be created for women to enter and participate in the construction industry on an equal basis. It also indicates that, without strong measures being adopted to specifically target women in our policies and programmes, these initiatives could conceivably miss women as participants.

I therefore proposed, today a year ago, that there be a special initiative which addresses itself to the specific situation of women in construction with a view to accelerating empowerment of women business enterprises at a prime contractor level.

It is indeed gratifying to launch the " Women in Construction: Strategic Empowerment Programme", an initiative that intends to:

- Build sustainable capacity with the women owned business enterprise
- Accelerate the development of women contractors who are capable of executing large construction projects as prime contractors
- Raise the profile of women contractors
- Ensure that women business enterprises access the opportunities presented by our departmental projects
- And lastly, ensure that women owned and controlled businesses develop and grow.

Projects to the value of about **R135 million** have been earmarked to kick-start this programme nation-wide. Of this amount, projects to the value of more than **R22 million** are earmarked for the Eastern Cape region.

These projects, specifically targeted to attract women, either at a prime contractor level or at least with a 30% women participation goal, include:

- Middledrift Magistrate's Office for rebuilding and new additions. This project is out on tender from 27 July 2001
- Middleburg SA Police Station: Repairs to roofs and general repairs. The project went out on tender on 03 August 2001

- King Williams Town Deeds Office. Tenders will go out 30 November 2001
- Idutywa SA Police Station, to go out on tender on 10 August 2001
- Transkei: Mpisi SA Police Station, for which the tender will go out on 24 August 2001
- Msobomvu: SA Police Station upgrading, that will go out on tender on 17 August 2001.
- Alice: Magistrate's Offices, that will go out on tender on 24 August 2001.
- Lady Grey SA Police Station, that will also go out on tender on 24 August 2001.
- Grahamstown High Court for complete Repairs and Renovations. This tender will go out by 31 August 2001.
- Dordrecht Prison for complete Repairs and Renovation to go out on tender by 31 August 2001.

The other provinces have similar projects going out on tender:

Northern Province	±R4,1 million
Free State	±R11,8 million
Gauteng	±R30 million
KwaZulu-Natal	±R3,8 million
Western Cape	±R4,8 million
Mpumalanga	±R42 million
Northern Cape	±R1,3 million
North West	±R14,6 million

Ladies and Gentlemen, this initiative must be seen within the broader context of government's overall strategy for equitable development of our country and its people. And like all other government's initiatives we still have a long way to go before we can say that we have broken the back of the legacy of apartheid and patriarchy in terms of women participation in construction industry.

The construction industry has traditionally been a male dominated industry. The Association of General Contractors (AGC), the Building Industries Federation of South Africa (BIFSA), the South African Federation of Civil Engineering Contractors (SAFSEC) and the Black Construction Council (BCC), are all run almost exclusively by men. This situation is further compounded by the family and community held attitudes towards women's appropriate place in society. It is the way it always has been, but this is not the way it should be. To ensure growth and development in any industry, you cannot exclude half of the possible participants. This is about to change.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the challenges we are faced with in developing the capacity of women owned businesses correlates strongly with the essence of challenges facing the South African Construction Industry.

Growing the construction economy through increased investment and job creation is one major challenge facing the country. Investment in the industry is essential if we are to substantially absorb new entrants to the industry. The establishment of the Construction Industry Development Board is one of the biggest accomplishments towards addressing the broad challenges facing the Industry in general, women contractors in particular.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me inform you here today that the Department will be announcing in the near future the " Best women owned contracting business of the year" award. The award will be presented to a top performing women owned business every year on Women's Day. I hope this will help to create a healthy competition among women participating in the Strategic Empowerment Programme.

We are engaged in establishing concrete criteria for selecting the top performers, and will be announcing these criteria soon.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the launch of this initiative is just the beginning of a difficult journey ahead of us. It is also a demonstration of our commitment to accelerate the participation of women in mainstream economic and particularly construction industry activities.

I therefore call on all women to prove the skeptics wrong, and I also call on all key industry stakeholders to support the initiative. We have, for example, already established commitment from the IDC, Khula and Ntsika in terms of the guarantees and to assist in accessing bridging finance.

In conclusion, let me address myself to the women contractors gathered here today. The horizons of women have widened. Your struggles and sacrifices have not been in vain. As women we hold a tremendous potential to make a difference to this country. For as someone once said: "When you teach a man, you teach an individual; when you teach a woman you teach a family". Let me confidently add that, when you empower women you are empowering a nation.

Let us spare no effort in ensuring that South African women will write a glorious chapter in the Millennium African Recovery Programme. The victory of women's emancipation is a triumph for all humanity. History beckons women to be in the forefront of the struggle against unemployment, lack of housing, inadequate social services and HIV/AIDS. As an industry, the construction industry is rating the third highest in the incidence of HIV/Aids in South Africa – indeed a challenge to our women to contribute towards improved health and safety within this industry.

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