

SPEECH BY MINISTER THOKO DIDIZA
OPENING WOMENS CONFERENCE
ETHIOPIAN EPISCOPAL CHURCH-UMZI WASE TOPIYA/MOTSE WA
TOPIA

THEME: "COME LET US BUILD"

I greet you all in the wonderful name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

It is an honour and privilege for me to take part in this special convention, where women of "Umzi wa Topiya" are gathered to remind themselves of their role and significance in today's world.

The Ethiopian Episcopal Church was founded by the late Archbishop Dwane and Mrs Dwane (grandfather of the late bishop Dwane), for true authentic African values and principles. They stood for what they believed in, that Africa knew God before the missionaries came here. They wanted Africans to know and experience their God in their own way, and not to be brain washed by the western mentality, which said that everything that was African is inferior.

As this convention takes place in the month of September, when we celebrate "Heritage month" it is only right to commemorate our heroes and heroines like the Archbishop Dwane and Mrs Dwane, who played a significant role in forming and shaping who we are today!

The spirit of forgiveness preached by our churches, filled the hearts of the great leaders of our country like Nelson Mandela, and also helped our people, as a whole, to cope emotionally with

the transition to democracy. You will agree with me that, the church had played a major role in driving the process of reconciliation and healing the wounds of the past.

Churches integrated our communities, they changed attitudes, they transformed themselves into institutions of the New South Africa, they reached out and bridged the divides between communities and they speeded up the process of nation-building. Our churches continue to play an important role in shaping building our society, influencing government policy, and improving the lives of people in our communities.

Today we acknowledge and applaud the efforts our churches and church leaders for the positive role they are playing in our communities often taking the lead in social upliftment projects, skills development and training, HIV/AIDS counseling and dealing with the trauma of violence against women and children.

Indeed the battle is not over; hence Tata Mandela once said that, *"A nation will never be free until its women are free!"*

We are all aware that, South Africa comes from an era of institutional racism and sexism. I believe that we are even aware that black women experienced double discrimination, in the form of racial and gender discrimination. This has also perpetuated poverty, hence black women have carried a disproportionate burden of being underdeveloped and the majority still does. South African black women continue to face serious inequalities and disadvantages in all aspects of life such as business, government, in their communities, as well as their households.

HIV/AIDS is a serious problem in South Africa as it affects women disproportionately to men. The power imbalances between women

and men within interpersonal relations on tribute to this growing pandemic, as well as unequal access to economic resources that result in women having greater exposure to high-risk survival practices, which may include the exchange of sex for food, shelter, money and other resources.

Also, violence against women remains a serious problem within South African society. The high incidences of rape cases, as well as other forms of physical and psychological abuse of women and girls, are evidence of this.

Religious communities are in touch with the grassroots, the poor are in our pews, the churches have the gift of resources of infrastructure and personnel. Therefore, it is only right that the government and the church form partnerships to ensure effective delivery. We have to make sure that not just the spiritual, but the physical needs are met. It is therefore essential that the State, civil society and the church among others co-operate and collaborate with each other in working towards the entrenchment of our fledgling democracy.

I need to highlight that there are many initiatives that the government has put in place to redress the imbalances of the past. For instance in my Department, EPWP endeavors to create more opportunities for employment and develop skills especially to the youth and women. I would encourage you to engage yourselves and promote such initiatives.

I believe that there are many Charlotte Manye Maxeke in this very convention, a leader in her own right long ago in the 19th Century, in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, who was the first African women from South African women to obtain a BSc. She may be also called the mother of "Ethopia" because of the part in

the amalgamation of the Ethiopian church and AME church, she worked tirelessly to educate her community, and involved herself in social action.

EPHESIANS 2:10 SAYS, "WE ARE GOD'S WORKMANSHIP, CREATED IN CHRIST JESUS TO DO GOOD WORKS, WHICH GOD PREPARED IN ADVANCE FOR US TO DO." (NIV) I BELIEVE THAT WE ARE CREATED FOR A PURPOSE., AND THAT PURPOSE IS TO BUILD OUR WORLD AND MAKE IT A BETTER PLACE FOR ALL.

South Africa is truly a land of possibility, a place where the human spirit is free and supported to turn dreams for the future into daily reality. This 'possibility' is what makes South Africans unique, owning and building shaping their futures.

I want to reiterate what President Thabo Mbeki said when he addressed your Centenary Synod in the year 2000,

- **" We must work together to educate all our citizens that each one of us has the responsibility to work for a better life for all our people, especially the poor;**
- **Together, we must rebuild the moral fibre of our society to restore the understanding that each one of us is made in God's image;**
- **We must work to ensure that all our people re-learn the truth that, murder, violence against the person, rape, abuse of women and children, robbery and theft are offensive to our very concept of ourselves as Africans;**
- **We must join in a common struggle to restore the pride of our people, regardless of race, ethnicity and gender in their common African origins, as Tiyo Soga, and Mangena and Mokone did".**

Conclusion

Tears of a Woman

A young boy once asked his father, and he said that women cry for no reason. The boy was not satisfied with the answer and phoned God, he said to God that , why is it that my mother cries easily? God replied that

- 1. 'My child women cry because I have made them in a special way, I have made them strong enough to carry the world on their shoulders.**
- 2. I have made them in such a way that they can endure pain**
- 3. Made them to be so gentle so that they can nurture the world.**
- 4. to be submissive so that they can care for everyone even the lowly**
- 5. With their tears they are able to comfort others and embrace the world.**
- 6. With their tears they cry for humankind, they have enough tears to share**
- 7. With their tears they are able to support their husbands, I made them from the rib of a man to protect his heart.**
- 8. I have given them the gift of being compassionate for thy can care for others before they care for themselves.**

So women go out there and build our nation!