

The Minister of Public Works, Ms Thoko Didiza, MP, at the invitation of the Limpopo Provincial Government and SABC Phalaphala FM, addresses the Limpopo Divas Conference on the occasion to celebrate the 50th Anniversary of Women's march

Venue: Oasis Lodge, Polokwane, Limpopo.

Date: 08 August 2006.

- The Premier of Limpopo, Mr Sello Moloto
- All the Members of the Executive Council present.
- Members of the Limpopo Provincial Legislature.
- The Regional General Manager of SABC, Mr Victor Ravhuanzwo and all other SABC senior officials
- Government Officials in attendance
- Distinguished Guests.
- Ladies and Gentlemen:

It gives me a pleasure to be amongst you, in this, my maiden visit to the glorious province of Limpopo since my appointment as the Minister of Public Works. The location of Mapungubwe and Thulamela historical sites, Limpopo Province is always an inspiration, perhaps a compelling reason for us to revisit our history with the purpose of rediscovering it. Many remarkable events of historic proportions have happened here, in this northern corner of our country and we believe they are laden with historical significance, which if fully probed and established, will require us to further question our conventional notion of South Africa modern history.

I want to thank the civil society including the media for their support in our first ever National Construction Week Campaign which we celebrated from 27 July to 03 August 2006. The aim of the campaign was to create awareness among South Africans about the role and importance of the construction industry in our reconstruction and development. For our youth, we encourage them to consider taking up a career in this industry. Career options are wide and varied include disciplines such as engineering, architecture, quantity surveying, landscape architecture, property valuation and construction project management.

Institutions that shape our perceptions of the world such as the SABC are important in formulating our culture. Since time immemorial, the people used art to express themselves while at the same time they were influenced by art forms in defining their identity. And the likes of SABC and other media play a role in defining our culture, ourselves and our struggle.

Given their power, media institutions are critical in shaping how we view the world around us. The representation of race and gender relations in the media can go a long way towards bettering the treatment of women in our society. In this Age of Hope, when women are within reach of many opportunities, the media should be pushing the repositioning of the role of women in society, both as a content and the context. Over a long time, media had used women as objects of desire in their content. Portrayed either as beauty queens or docile housewives, women's role in the society was defined for them. Innocent advertisements for households products stopped being innocent as women were portrayed mostly as

uncritical consumers of these items which were made, marketed and recommended by men.

Most media houses lacked women in their corridors of power. Except as on-air presenters, it was rare to come across women board members, senior managers and other executives. Thanks to the winds of change that have been sweeping through our sub-continent in the past twelve years, the status quo is changing and women are taking up rightful positions in our boardrooms and other corridors of powers. In this regard we like to congratulate SABC for braving the storm and appointing fifty percent of women to the Group Executive.

This is symptomatic of the trend that we have been noticing in the media industry with women moving into decision-making positions.

These achievements and many others would not be possible without the foundations that were laid by our foremothers in the history of our struggle. In rewriting our history, we need to locate the influence of matriarchs such as Mantatise, Mkabayi ka Jama and Modjadji among others and the role they played in planting incipient seeds of revolt against oppression and unfair systems of patriarchy. Many were the rulers and regents who reared future leaders and bequeathed courage and bravery to our struggles for freedom.

With the formations of the South African Native Congress in 1912 which later became the African National Congress, the consciousness for people's freedoms had been laid. When the white government under the

Union of South Africa enacted the first in the series of Native Land Acts in 1913, the women among other groups took to the streets in protest against what they perceived to be encroachment to their right to land. This was the beginning of the solidifying of women's struggles in South Africa. Other episodes in our history including the Defiance Campaigns of the 50's and 60's began to see the increasing involvement and participation of women, culminating with the historic women's march to Pretoria on 09 August 1956. On that occasion, women lamented the effect that the pass laws were going to have on stable families and declared:

We want to tell you what the pass would mean to an African woman, and we want you to know that whether you call it a reference book, an identity book, or by any other disguising name, to us it is a PASS. And it means just this:

- *That homes will be broken up when women are arrested under pass laws*
- *That children will be left uncared for, helpless, and mothers will be torn from their babies for failure to produce a pass*
- *That women and young girls will be exposed to humiliation and degradation at the hands of pass-searching policemen*
- *That women will lose their right to move freely from one place to another*

In the name of women of South Africa, we say to you, each of us, African, European, Indian, Coloured, that we are opposed to the pass system.

This streak would prevail even in the dark days, following the banning of the legitimate vehicles for people to express their political sentiments. Stalwarts such as Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Albertinah Sisulu, Helen Joseph and others kept the flame of women resilience burning bright despite the repressive machinery of the apartheid government. Often women would, away from glaring eye of media, continue to wage daily battles on the social front, taking scraps that apartheid threw at them and turning those into positive fuel for nation-building, community development and moral regeneration.

In recognition of this contribution, women development issues dominated the agenda at the Kempton Park World Trade Centre talks designed to shape the political and social milieu of new South Africa. Today South Africa prides itself with being among the top ten (10) countries in the world that have more women representation (33%) in their legislature. Five out of nine of our Provincial Heads are women. In the private sector the rate has been slow but steady and many women have moved into commanding positions, all in the name of development

The Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Witwatersrand, a woman and a scholar of note, Dr Belinda Bozzoli once remarked that modern South African history teaches us nothing but the unfolding of the Afrikaner Volk and the subjectification of blacks.

In order to justify the present under apartheid, historians, largely Afrikaans historians, began to look back at the past, in history, to find justifications for the existence of apartheid. In this they were assisted by theologians such as Dr D.F. Malan, the proponent of apartheid, who dissected the Bible to find the rationale for separate development and racial segregation. Our true history was and a version of history began to appear in our schools which celebrated Afrikaner military conquests over the natives, and like in the American Western Movies, began to give impression of the natives invading the private space of settlers with the intention to dispossess the settlers of their all, including land.

The lesson from this experience is that history tends to favour those who write it. If women in Africa and everywhere else were to record their history, their role in reconstruction, development and civilisation, would be different. Women would cease to be mere victims of men's acts of aggression, often seen on TV and other media, with babies on their back and bundles of meager possessions on their heads fleeing civil wars and other man-made disasters. If women were to write about their involvement in nation-building, community development, moral regeneration and education, the world's perception of women would change.

This is not at all intended to discredit men. However, we dare suggest that history about women not written by women is unlikely to be understanding and appreciative of women's struggle and other emotions as they toil side by side with their men folk to build a future for the

nation. According to the history we read, which coincidentally is written by men, the text is punctuated by wars, military exploits and other acts of aggression so much that we have come to think of men as capable of nothing but aggression. The current images of war in Darfur and Lebanon do not better our perception of the destructiveness of men's involvement with history.

We all know the story of a young boy who kept on disturbing his priest father as he sat preparing a sermon for the next day. Wanting to find something to preoccupy him, the father took a picture of the map of the world, tore it into small pieces and asked the boy to reconstruct it. Within a few minutes the boy, much to the father's disbelief, had put the whole map together. Astonishingly the father asked the boy: "but how did you manage that?" The boy answered: "well it was easy, there was a picture of a man's face on the other side, so all I had to do was to fix the man's face and the world followed suit".

In 1955 when the democrats lined up the streets of Kliptown to adopt a Charter of Human's freedoms, women were part of that movement. A year later, women wrote their history when they put words into action. Women of South Africa, both - black and white, old and young, rural and urban, educated and illiterate, literally marched onto Pretoria to warn one Prime Minister Strijdom not to tamper with the rock upon which humanity is founded. *"You struck the woman, you struck the rock and you would die"*. They warned Strijdom. Indeed Hans Strijdom died thereafter.

On the fiftieth (50th) anniversary of Women's historic March, we gather here in Limpopo, the house of Mapungubwe and Thulamela, to demand that let our history be rewritten to accurately reflect the struggles of women and girl children, who daily toil to lay concrete foundations upon which human virtues are built in this Age of Hope. On this occasion, we salute the women of Limpopo from Tshipise Nzhelele (pronounced Njelele) to Elands kraal who in 1998, with the small help of government's Public Works Programme and Eskom funding, took a barren landscape and turned it into a productive machinery to feed themselves and the nation. We hail the women of Ga- Ramokgopa, Botokwa, who under the Community Based Public Works Programme, never hesitated to take opportunities available, no matter how limited, to improve theirs and the lives of the community. These and the women of Elandskraal took the hand of government in a partnership, to till the land, plant food and built infrastructure and join in the struggle to turn-back the tide of poverty. This is indicative of the struggle of women throughout South Africa who on daily basis work to make this country a better place.

Limpopo Province boast some of the most progressive and influential women in the country, and as we celebrate women's day we need to recognize and honour these women. The likes of world renowned artist Noria Mabasa whose works have been showcased around the world and who tomorrow one of her art works which depicts the women's march that occurred in 1956 will be unveiled by our president at the Union buildings. We have woman like Bheka Ntsanwisi- the Shoprite – Checkers woman of the year 2005/06- who embodies the true meaning of women and is an inspiration to many. Bheka like the heroines that marched to the Union buildings facing adverse challenges that of being a woman and black at that, does not fear challenges that face her. Although she's living with colon cancer she still has this renewed

strength to help other people, extending a hand of compassion like a mother should. This is what we need to celebrate as woman and encourage each other in the different activities that we are involved in.

This province is also blessed with the monarchy of queens, who rule over the Balobedu people. The rain queen Modjadji, it just goes to show that, even before we could dream of it, this province was already ahead in terms of the emancipation of women.

And there are many more, which I might not be able to mention by name from this province who has contributed extensively to the struggle and emancipation of woman. The likes of deputy Minister of Environmental Affairs Rejoice Mabudafhasi who also hail from Limpopo.....

I like to thank the organizers for their invitation and wish all the women a successful life. The struggles of the 1956 calibre and others before have laid a basis for the emancipation of women and enabled us today to sing in unison the songs of freedom. From this freedom let there spring eternal prosperity for the nation and its future generations regardless of gender.

I thank you.