

**THE MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS MS THOKO DIDIZA, MP, DELIVERS A  
KEYNOTE ADDRESS AT THE OCCASION TO CELEBRATE A WOMEN'S MONTH  
AT RANDFONTEIN**

**VENUE: TOEKOMSRUS COMMUNITY HALL, RANDFONTEIN, GAUTENG**

**DATE: 26 AUGUST 2006**

- The Executive Mayor of Randfontein Local Municipality, Zeph Mhlongo
- The Acting Municipal Manager, Ms Liziwe Ntshinga-Makoro
- Members of the Mayoral Committee
- All Councillors
- Our distinguished guests from the entertainment industry
- Ladies and Gentlemen

I am humbled by your invitation to visit the Greater Randfontein Local Municipality. It is an honour for me to stand on the grounds of champions. Randfontein, including townships of Mohlakeng and Toekomsrus, are known world-wide to have produced world champions and other stars of note, which sadly, are all men, begging the question about the role and the involvement of women of the area. Names such as the legendary Patrick "Ace" Ntsoelengoe, Peter "Terror" Mathebula and Bobang Phiri are synonymous with Randfontein yet the city has got to dig in deeper to come with women sports icons, immediately presenting the leadership of this area with a developmental challenge.

As we celebrate the women's month, it is important to take stock of the contribution of women in the development of our communities, and their role in the economy as a

whole. The West Rand District Municipality, of which the Greater Randfontein Municipality is a part, is a home to women who have dedicated their lives to creating a better life for all. Our beloved MEC for Housing in Gauteng, Nomvula Mokonyane, still calls this place home. Her Worship, the Executive Mayor of West Rand District Municipality, Faith Matshikiza is an epitome of leadership necessary to inject passion among the women of Randfontein to emulate their predecessors in the 1950s to change the fundamentals of the society for good. Pascalina Kgoleng, Nosisi Msibi, Jeanette Daniels, Yvodia Cindi and Terressa Kibane are among the pathfinders who struggled to usher in the democracy we and the stability we seem to enjoy today. The presence today of Mara Louw, a famous singer, entertainer and television personality and Penny Lebyane who you all know from the world of broadcasting, is indicative of the fact that women daily continue to make their presence felt, yet we are slow to react to their contribution. Fifty years on, our history continues to record their achievements only as an after thought.

This is a travesty of history because the women's march of 1956, which we are celebrating today, must have had some catalytic effects on the advancement of women.

The 1950s saw the solidification of women movement as a social force to be reckoned with. In other areas of life, apart from the politics, women began to become more assertive. This spirit of freedom and assertiveness was aptly demonstrated in the person of one of the daughters of Randfontein, Ms Dolly Rathebe who became an entertainment legend, gracing the covers of Drum and Zonk Magazines and appearing in many films. She was laying a foundation for a generation of talented women who came after her and today are successful artists and entrepreneurs, owning their entertainment companies. This is the excellence we want to celebrate today.

A stone throw away from here at old Top Location near Vereeniging in the Vaal Triangle, a young woman, Adelaide, growing in this decade of organized defiance, had had her political instincts sharpened by the experiences of the people around her who were survivors of constant forced removals under the apartheid laws. Under apartheid, the people of Top were forcefully removed to Sharpeville, echoing the distress of many communities in the country. As a young bride of Oliver Reginald Tambo, she would forsake the comforts of a new marriage, to spearhead the struggle of women even beyond the borders, carrying the torch lit by other stalwarts.

Long before the 1956 Women's March to Pretoria, women had started rewriting history. Therefore the historical 1956 march was a culmination of women's efforts to contribute to the building of an equitable society. The fact that we are here today to observe and honour their contribution to democracy indicates that 1956 was just a milestone. It represented the end of one stretch and the beginning of another.

The formation of the ANC at Bloemfontein in 1912 revealed to what extent women had been exposed to, and experienced many injustices inflicted on their men folk by successive colonial rulers and their racism. It were the women of Free State who in 1913, rose up against incipient signs of apartheid when they took to the streets in protest against the notorious Land Act in that year which sought to make African people a landless class in their own country. This pattern would be replicated throughout the country in subsequent decades as women learn to mobilize and articulate their objections, not only to racism, apartheid and injustice, but also to the draconian pass laws which they viewed as attacking the very foundation of society which is the family. Again the women of Free State occupied the front berth as they demonstrated against the pass laws in 1955. In the same year, ahead of the Congress of the People at

Kliptown, about 140 delegates representing more than 230 000 women met at the National Conference of Women and adopted a Women's Charter as prelude to the Freedom Charter. The Charter spelt out the demands for women with regard to their rights. Women's struggles are recorded in history as the nucleus of solidarity and sisterhood driven by determination to reject attempts to alienate communities, break up families and divide the nation along racial and class lines. The 1950's became bedrock for women's resistance as apartheid became intensified. Everywhere women became instant victims, directly or indirectly of apartheid laws including much-hated pass laws. Apart from the fact that these laws were now extended to women, women resented that they turned their men into migrant labourers and condemned them to cities of gold.

Towns like Randfontein were the products of the gold boom at the beginning of the twentieth century and saw the close collaboration between the big business and apartheid government to deny black people their basic human rights. Women became the worst affected. Randfontein was separated from Krugersdorp in 1929 to become a separate municipality premised on wealth generated by the Randfontein Estates Gold Mine. The sprawling outskirts of town became native locations, townships from which black people could watch as wealth was being squandered past their needs.

Today like most municipalities, the Greater Randfontein must contend with the effects of apartheid social planning and financial allocation with a lopsided economy and a deficient social plan characterized by backlogs in infrastructure procurement and maintenance, housing, unemployment and high prevalence of HIV and Aids. Today Randfontein and many similar towns stand as monuments, reminding us of the extent of transformation and development still lying ahead. The work requires women too.

The fact that the gender representation at the political executive level of the Municipality has increased and is nearly at 50/50 ratio is a progressive milestone and is a welcome relief. However, this achievement needs to be replicated at the senior management positions within the municipality. Gender equality needs to be accelerated as an honour not only to women of 1956 but as recognition of the role of women of Randfontein in building this community. I do not agree with the history that says there are no women icons in this area. Women such as Angie Makwetla and Oulady Motjuwadi, who hail from here, are today established business people, owning successful communication and information technology enterprises, respectively, and contributing not only to economic growth but also helping to accelerate numbers behind gender representativity in the boardrooms of this country.

Pam Mgulwa another entrepreneur is a daughter-in-law of Randfontein and perhaps an example of a contribution any daughter-in-law can bring to any supportive family, where their creative views are appreciated and nurtured. The Former Mayor of this area, Councillor Ntombi Mavuso is a power-house of experience and we need to harness insights of people like her to encourage maximum women participation in community life and accelerate the achievement of national gender representative goals. Until we do that, we run the risk of distorting our own history and depriving any girl children role models. I stand here today in support of the Plough Back Initiatives that you have started through the Randfontein Products and Professional Forums to identify and recruit back to the area the prominent people who can make a positive contribution to the regeneration of the place – economically, academically, socially, culturally and otherwise.

To the women of Randfontein, I need to remind you that you are the beneficiaries to the will written in 1955 and 1956 in testament to your tenacity and prowess. Again be reminded that 1956 was not the beginning but an affirmation of the movement that is probably as old as humankind. The fact that the role of women was seen fit to be excised from historical accounts does not mean women were passive participants in civilization and historical processes. Our true contribution is yet to be fully recorded.

I THANK YOU.