

ADDRESS BY IMT MAHLANGU, EXECUTIVE MAYOR DURING WOMEN
SUMMIT 2008

PROGRAM DIRECTOR
HONOURABLE COUNCILLORS
REPRESENTATIVES FROM SAWIMA
REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE HEALTH MINISTRY
REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT
REPRESENTATIVE FROM THE DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
REPRESENTATIVES FROM OTHER PARASTATALS
OUR TRADITIONAL AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS
WOMEN OF STEVE TSHWETE
INTRODUCTION

Nginibingelele nonke! Malibongwe..... igama lamakhosikazi! I am thrilled to join you today when all mothers in South Africa celebrate Women's Month.

Let me start by thanking and acknowledging all those who will be participants for passing knowledge and thus empowering other women in this event for the benefit of women in our municipality.

Allow me as we continue to celebrate the birthday of our father of reconciliation, uTata uNelson Rolihlahla Mandela to wish him a belated happy birthday. He said at our country's opening of first democratically elected parliament on May 24 1994, "Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression.

Let me also congratulate a 27 year old Egyptian woman who gave birth to septuplets, seven babies, four boys and three girls.
It is indeed a rare experience in our generation.

We celebrate this historic month and an event because it is central to our struggle for human rights and the principles of non-sexism.

PURPOSE

We have gathered here today during Women's Month to say with one voice as public representatives, traditional and church leaders, business leaders, the youth, women's organizations that we all agree with the theme of Business Unusual: All Power to Women.

Last year, we hosted a successful "Women in Mining Summit " as a way to say to women of Steve Tshwete Municipality they can do it and in every sector and this year we are once more saying the struggle continues and we need to grab opportunities at our disposal.

Many a times we tend to think that a big fish can only be grabbed in Gauteng or even abroad. But I believe that as women we can unleash the potential and use what we have.

We embrace and celebrate gender and women's rights because as President Thabo Mbeki revealed some good news during the Women's Day celebration at Ga-Motlatla, in North West, when he said while the country's parliament is ranked 10th out of 130 parliaments in the world in women's representation but still more had to be done. "Forty three percent of the members of cabinet are women.

Four of the nine provinces are led by women premiers. At local level 40 percent of councilors are women and three of six metros are led by women. In Nkangala District Municipality, four local municipalities are led women. Program Director, we therefore collectively say we support efforts to empower and elevate women because we know that ultimate freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. In article dated 11 August 2008, it was reported that Mpumalanga emerged as the province with the highest number of unqualified audit statements for the financial year 2007 -08. Nkangala district municipality received unqualified audit outcomes in all its municipalities. On average, we have spent 90 percent of the municipal infrastructure grant (MIG). We also provide more 12 000 indigent households with free basic water and electricity.

President Thabo Mbeki also called upon the nation to stand up against the abuse of women when he said " Violence against women violates the rights and

undermines the dignity of our sisters, mothers, and daughters. It undermines our democratic victory."

My message today is straightforward: if women of the Steve Tshwete are to totally liberate themselves from all forms of dependence, then the only path available is through networking with other women to learn their recipe like we have gathered here today with women from different sector to identify and discuss opportunities.

Before you leave make sure that atleast you target ten women and get their contacts for you to keep in touch so that this Summit can make a difference in your life.

BACKGROUND

As Steve Tshwete, we lend our weight behind women intervention to fight poverty and unemployment as we remember what women can achieve if they act together as heroines of August 9, 1956 did.

Today and throughout the month of August we reaffirm the sheer power of the twenty thousand women who descended on the Union Buildings in Pretoria to demand the repeal of the pass laws.

We remember the 50th anniversary of the Zeerust anti-pass campaign, a campaign whereby women burned the symbol of their oppression - the pass book.

We remember and honor the thousands of women who stood up against the new law. We pay tribute to all women, encouraging to throw off all the age-old shackles that still bind so many of us.

Our country has been inspired by countless heroines of the liberation, struggle, omama uCharlotte Magxeke, Getrude Shope, Winnie Madikizela Mandela, Epainette Mbeki etc.

CONTEXT OF WOMEN'S DAY

Yes, we admit that there has been progress and we have achieved tangible milestones in advancing and improving our women within the municipality.

At the same time we recognize that challenges remain. We still have to confront persisting inequality and gender discrimination in public and at workplace and face up to women and child abuse at home and the community.

Whilst on women abuse and discrimination, we tend to think that abuse only comes from men, yet we forget that we are the enemies of ourselves, we have a tendency of pulling each other down. This statement makes my mind wander to Lusikisiki where Nokuzola Mfiki made decision that has shocked many in our country: I ask myself

- How big was the turmoil in her soul as she fed her four young children poison?
- How deep was the hurt and humiliation she felt as she herself drank the poison?

She probably turned around and there was nobody waiting....

When she turned around the lights had gone down. The once-friendly voices of her neighbors had turned into weapons of murder. What came out of their mouths was too much for her to bear. The rumour they spread about being HIV-positive was too much. They scorned her. They shunned her (other women).

Our communities have become cold and unfriendly.

"I can no longer continue with life because this community is laughing at me, humiliating me and my children because they say I have AIDs, read a letter she wrote before committing suicide.

If rumors of HIV can drive a woman to death, it means there is still a lot of work to be done in destigmatising HIV/AIDs. Let us stop pulling each other down, instead let us be there for each other because we understand the burdens that women experience.

All of us are too aware of the continuing challenge of teenage pregnancy, and unemployment among able-bodied youth which contributes to the poverty cycle.

As women and the same time parents, it is high time we do something about the escalating dumping of newly born babies in our municipality.

We continuously read about gruesome stories of dumped babies, in the Middelburg Observer.

Recently, one of our employees, had an unfortunate experience whilst on duty in Dennesig where she discovered a body of a deformed baby in a black plastic bag.

What have we become sisters?. As women we must realize that these struggles must definitely be conquered if we are to be hailed as heroines like we do our to 1956 heroines.

Women are like a judiciary, of its nation, community, and if the judiciary has lost its dignity, that country, community is dead. What I mean is that we are the backbones of our community, let us model the way for our youth regardless of the challenges.

We are aware of the burdens of limited economic opportunities among rural women and difficulties faced by majority of our grassroots people have to live through due to illiteracy and not having information to sustain and get their small businesses successfully off the ground.

That is why as Steve Tshwete we entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with farmers to enable us to access and deliver services to women in rural areas.

Moreover, we still continue with the establishment of rural villages so that we can improve and empower women in rural areas.

We all know what to do as mother, daughters and wives. Doing it together we are stronger but individually we are weaker.

I strongly believe that loving our children by passionately attending their social, emotional, spiritual is the only weapon of curbing them involving themselves in drugs, alcohol, eliciting sex, dropping out school. By doing this, we shall have won them to our side.

At times it is difficult to do this, because of this instant lifestyle, but let us be there for them. Patiently raising them to be what we want them to become.

Fortunately women, children, of the Steve Tshwete Municipality can now access help at their disposal as we managed to establish a Gender and Social

Development unit and have appointed a Manager whose office is open to listen to all your challenges so that they can be addressed.

There is a pressing need as well for early childhood development centres which would be daycare facilities with an educational slant in our municipality. With this few words, I welcome you to this Women Summit 2008, enjoy yourselves.

I thank you.