

SPEECH BY THE PREMIER OF THE FREE STATE, S.H NTOMBELA ON THE OCCASION OF THE PROVINCIAL WOMEN'S DAY CELEBRATIONS FOR THE HEALTHCARE SECTOR, BOBBIES PARK, BLOEMFONTEIN, 10 AUGUST 2021,

MEC for Health, Montseng Tsiu

MECs present,

The Acting Head of Department for Health, Godfrey Mahlatsi

Leaders of Government business and employees present,

Distinguished guests,

Members of the media

Bo mme le bo ntate.

We are gathered here today to honour the women of our province, particularly those in the Healthcare sector.

Women who, in the face of a dreadful pandemic, led from the front.

Indeed - *Bo mme ba tswara thipa ka bohaleng!*

Ladies and gentlemen, **sixty-five** (65) years ago, our leaders of those foundational times of our struggle for freedom, demonstrated the strength of the oppressed and importantly, the strength of women. This, they did by travelling to Pretoria from

all corners of our country, to demand an end to the degrading carrying of passes in the country of their birth.

This action was of great risk to themselves because the illegitimate government of the time was known to resort to extreme measures whenever they felt that their authority was challenged. By confronting the regime, those brave women literally placed themselves in harm's way. In a show of defiance, and an act so bold and daring, they set their passes alight. The mantra was: *wa thintsha abafazi, wa thinta imbokodo!*. Finally, the bully was challenged.

Finally, the women of South Africa, who for the longest time, had been relegated to secondary citizens, had staked their claim in the land of their birth by standing up to the regime. The women declared that they would no longer allow themselves to be treated as sub-humans.

Finally, the women of South Africa had found their voice. Today, we honour such women – women of substance, who would not let circumstances deter them from achieving a goal that would be for the betterment of their people!

Bo mme le bo ntate, today, we live in a democratic country mainly due to the sacrifices of women. However, as we celebrate women and what they have achieved over the years and today, we must NOT be blinded to the challenges that continue to devastate our society, particularly women.

We are still confronted by the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. We are confronted by another pandemic in the form of Gender Based Violence (GBV).

Ka bo madimabe, bo mme ke bona ba shebaneng le mathata ana a tlhekefetso, haholo. Women continue to be faced by many of our societal ills.

In a society confronted by many challenges, it is women who are left to pick up the pieces. We have a difficult task of rebuilding and often healing our society. Let women hold hands with absolute grace and work together to face the challenges our province faces.

We stand here today as a proud people. We do however know that the road to ultimate freedom free from social ills, is a long one. Women continue to scarp for crumbs at the bottom of the food chain. Women continue to be overlooked for senior positions and women continue to be subjected to all kinds of abuse in their homes and in the workplace. The time for that to stop is NOW!

Even worse, women of our country continue to be subjected to Gender Based Violence. Only yesterday, I was in Harrismith, in the Eastern Free State, where a family of five was found butchered on Saturday. While we do not aim to downplay the seriousness of this vicious crime, I am trying to demonstrate that

a woman and her six-year-old daughter met their fate in the most violent manner.

Ana, ke matsatsi ao re phelang ho ona – a ditsietsi, le mahlomola! - even the desperate cries of a woman and a child are not enough to deter stone cold killers. As a result of this crime, the only surviving child in the family has been left orphaned with no one to take care of him.

Despite the tragedies of the world, women must never be silenced. Women must continue to shout for justice at the top of their voices!.

Ladies and gentlemen, we celebrate Women's Day as our country is desperately fighting COVID-19. This virus has already claimed thousands of lives in our province, turning many children into orphans.

Women have been at the forefront of this continuous battle against COVID-19.

From a Health- sector perspective, led by Mme MEC Montseng Tsiu, women at all levels in the health sector have displayed commendable courage in the face of danger. I applaud you all!

May those who have departed due to COVID-19 find eternal rest.

Women such as community health workers, cleaners, emergency medical personnel, nurses, doctors and many others have demonstrated bravery and compassion during this difficult

time. I wish to also specifically honour the following women for their inspiring leadership in governance, during this time:

- Ms. Claudia Mangwegape of the South African Red Cross Society;
- Dr. Seithati Molefi from Right to Care;
- Dr. Busi Msimang from the World Health Organization;
- Ms. Priscilla Monyobo, the Co-Coordinator of the Provincial Vaccine Rollout and also;
- Dr. Hellen Motlounng who is also the Co-Coordinator of the Provincial Vaccine Rollout.

Ours is a difficult task, but I know that we shall be victorious. We are walking in the footsteps of legends who have paved the way for us under very difficult conditions.

Our guiding light will be the indomitable spirit of Charlotte Maxeke, Lilian Ngoyi, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Albertina Sisulu, Adelaide Tambo and many of our dearly departed heroines who set us on the path to freedom. The war cry remains *'Wa thinthā Abafazi, wa thinthā imbokodo.'*

Victory is certain.

Modimo a boloke bo mme, Freistata ka bophara, le Afrika Borwa kaofela! Ke ea Leboha!

I Thank you!