

Deputy Minister advances the cause for women emancipation

Correctional Services Deputy Minister Dr Ngoako Ramatlhodi led yet another one of the department's Women's Month activities when he addressed scores of women at the Johannesburg Management Area Sports Ground on Monday where he stressed the department's commitment to work towards realising the 50/50 employment status quo.

Throng of women from the ANC Women's League and Women from the Faith Based Missions, joined offenders and ex-offender as well as female correctional officials to celebrate Women's Month in a rejuvenated spirit. The atmosphere at the overflowing giant-sized marquee reached fever pitch as the women light up the proceeding with women empowerment songs and slogans in the presence of Rev Motlalepule Chabaku, the only living member of the Lilian Ngoyi Executive, the group that led over 20 000 women to a protest march at the Union Building to fight against women oppression in 1956.

The Deputy Minister said he was appeased to see gender transformation tables turning for the better at the department with the appointment of more women from production to senior management level. "Fifteen years ago, women made up a mere 11% (less than 4000) of the staff compliment of a total workforce of over 35 000. The figures have increased dramatically to 28% (11 500) of the staff total of 41 600 and we are excited about the figures. We must surge ahead with the emancipation of women to reach the envisaged 50/50 parallels," enthused Dr Ramatlhodi.

He emphasised that women deserved better treatment even in their conditions of incarceration and also appealed to the community to assist in ensuring that women inmates don't have to raise children within the confines of correctional facilities. "We are pleased that women only make 2% of our offender population. Let's work together to ensure that that figures do not increase. A correctional facility is no place for women and children as most of our facilities were not built to cater for women's needs," he said.

He said that the law makers ought to be challenged to ensure that one's previous status as an ex-offender does not count as a demerit to potential employers. He said that he will table the motion in parliament to assist in removing the stigma from potential employers who shun skilled persons on the basis of their criminal records.

He expressed his excitement upon realising that some 44 women will be released from incarceration during this month of August. He urged those due for release to use the skills learned while in incarceration to earn their respect in the communities they will be returning to.

A Member of the Portfolio Committee on Corrections Ms Winnie Ngwenya directed her address to women inmates. She said, "Women, you are not deserted in here. We admit that you have wronged society and that is why you are here to be helped. Your children miss you and they need you home. Remember to keep in touch with them through letters and any other forms of communication. Please take charge of your lives and behave so that you can be paroled and be reunited with your children and families."

She encouraged them to seek forgiveness from their victims while still incarcerated so that when time comes to go home, they would have started with healing the wounds of their victims. She also

shared the sentiments raised by the Deputy Minister around the criminal record discrimination and urged DCS to raise the matter in parliament and that her committee will support it.

Ms Faith Mazibuko, the Gauteng MEC for Community Liaison reminded the audience that the 1956 women did not struggle for nothing when they fought against oppression. She urged them not to let Adam (referring to men) to undermine or drive them to the life of crime. "Break the silence on women abuse and work hard to empower yourselves to avoid being oppressed by the Adams of this world who claim to be the sole providers," she said.

Ex female offender Ms Maki Motaung and Dudu Mahlabadile gave testimonies on living with a criminal record. "This place has made me who I am. It has changed me and now I even know how to pray. It's not easy out there. Make use of your mothers' taxes and grasp every opportunity available to you in here because you will certainly need it," assured Motaung.