

Minister heralds Women's Month with style and vision

As one of the leading lights of women in the country, Minister Nosiviwe Mapisa-Nqakula has in the past week left no stone unturned in her quest to boost the cause of women in our country. Apart from having a hectic diary to carry her wishes for a resounding programme of activism for women in Correctional Services, she continues to make a major impact on the national scene for women's empowerment.

On Sunday, 31 July 2011 she attended the media launch of the National Women's Consultative Conference that took place from 1 to 3 August 2011 in Boksburg. During the three-day conference Minister Mapisa-Nqakula was at the forefront. Not only did she address the audience with an inspirational address on the first day of the conference but she also chaired a panel discussion on the last day of the conference. The conference drew to a halt with a keynote address by Deputy President Mr Kgalema Motlanthe who also indicated that part of the conference also sought to find solutions for women in incarceration, particularly mothers with babies.

Minister Mapisa-Nqakula was also instrumental in putting together the Women's Declaration of the first National Women's Conference working together with over a thousand other female voices throughout the four-day consultative conference. The declaration document, the product of creative women's minds, was handed over to the Deputy President by the Minister of Women, Children and People with Disabilities, Ms Lulu Xingwana.

Minister Mpaisa-Nqakula together with her colleagues in government resolved to dedicate themselves to collaborating on;

- Addressing job creation, decent work and sustainable livelihoods for women, with particular emphasis on rural women and women with disabilities;
- Promoting education and skills development for women and girls, including in the science and technology, engineering and mathematics fields;
- Decreasing maternal mortality and fostering the implementation of the "four zeros" as articulated in the conference to address women's health issues especially HIV and Aids;
- Advancing the empowerment and development of rural women and ensuring their food security and land reform; and
- Combating and eradicating all forms of gender based violence and ensuring the establishment of a National Council on gender Based Violence.

Correctional Services can certainly be proud of having a Minister that is working at reforming Correctional Services but at the same time giving her all for the cause of women in South Africa steered by government in partnership with stakeholders.

On Thursday, 4 August, she addressed an illustrious audience gathered at the MTN Annual Women's Day Luncheon with the theme, ***Celebrating Women who have paved the way for the Emancipation and Advancement of Women.***

Minister Mapisa-Nqakula reiterated the fact that women in incarceration constitute a minority (2.3%) of the offender population. She, however, expressed a concern that their numbers are increasing. She also reflected on the department's efforts to move away from a punitive system to one that is aimed at correcting offending behaviour and one that invests in human development. This thinking she said "is based on the recognition that offending behaviour is borne of a social construct and in order to correct it you need interventions at a social level." She encouraged all people to take hands in doing things that will normalise society.

The Minister was explicit in pointing out that many women are “forced” into criminal activities because they are suffering abuse at the hands of their husbands and partners and by the negative circumstances they find themselves in. She is adamant that this must come to an end. Her message to women was that they did not need to remain in an abusive relationship until they got to the point where they took the law into their own hands and commit a crime.

Whilst steadfast in her tireless efforts to capitalise on Women’s Month and the opportunities it presents, she has also set the agenda for promoting the cause of women in Correctional Services. She is adamant that the plight of female offenders, as a vulnerable group, must be attended to, something that she has already embarked upon. She also hailed the effort of female correctional officials who had to fight their way into the once male dominated prison environment to make a meaningful difference. Fifteen years ago, women made up a mere 11% of the total staff compliment of the Department of Correctional Services. This meant that less than 4000 of the total workforce of 35 041 men. However, tables have turned significantly. Women now account for 28% or 11 500 of the total staff of 41 600 and the number is steadily increasing as the effort continue towards gender equity.

On Wednesday and Thursday this week, the Minister will be chairing a roundtable discussion for female correctional officials that will take place in Kempton Park. She called for this discussion to ensure that female officials become part of the mainstream agenda for women in the country.

To view the Minister’s calendar for August and to remain updated on developments, please visit the Women’s Month portal page on the intranet by clicking on the Women’s Month banner on the landing page.