



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONAL SERVICES: REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

OFFICE OF THE DEPUTY MINISTER

**Address by the Deputy Minister of Correctional Services, Mr.
Thabang Makwetla, MP
Female Ex-Offenders Conference
Orlando Community Hall, SOWETO
04 October 2014**

PROTOCOL

Please allow me to take this opportunity to express my sincere gratitude to the female offender choir and other individuals who have been nourishing our souls throughout the day with music. In one of his lyrics, Bob Marley sings that, "one good thing about music, when it hits you, you feel no pain." Beethoven too was probably correct to regard music as the "higher revelation than all wisdom and philosophy."

Baba Kunene, when I learned of your invitation for my presence at today's gathering, I was like King David in Psalms where he proclaimed that: "I rejoiced when they said to me, Let us go to the house of the Lord." Is it not written in Proverbs that, "the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord?"

Ladies and gentlemen,
Offenders and ex-offenders,
The Community of Soweto,

It was during the SABC TV programme called " Question Time" that I met ubaba u Mashikisha Kunene. Later on, this humble, anointed man of

God visited me at our Head Office in Pretoria with Pastor Joseph Nyembe, an ex-offender like Rev. Kunene himself, and discussed with me at length the science and art of corrections. They both shared insights with me and Management where they thought as a Department we could strengthen and improve our rehabilitation and reintegration programmes.

I am indeed delighted that I was able to accept Baba Kunene's invitation to come and participate in today's programme. Today's focus and conference on ex-women offenders speaks to the theme of God's miracle, grace, and power to change what man himself would have thought impossible to modify. This theme is not only a testament to the power of the Almighty and his enduring love in our lives, but also an affirmation of the everlasting hope and change that God brings to those who put him at the centre of their lives.

Ladies and gentlemen, our country is yearning for the selfless leadership that is demonstrated by uncelebrated community builders like Rev. Kunene, Nyembe, Julia Mashele, and Jayshree Nariansamy.

It is such organic intellectuals and leaders of our people who remind us that each effort aimed at making the world a better place is a crucial, necessary act of justice. May our individual and collective efforts at serving humanity be encouraged by the words of Robert F. Kennedy who stated that:

"Few will have the greatness to bend history itself, but each of us can work to change a small portion of events. It is from numberless diverse acts of courage and belief that human history is shaped. Each time a man stands up for an ideal, or acts to improve the lot of others, or strikes out against injustice, he sends forth a tiny ripple of hope, and crossing each other from a million different centres of energy and daring those ripples build a current which can sweep down the mightiest walls of oppression and resistance."

To all the ex-offenders, your testimonies and your changed lives demonstrate what an ancient Chinese sage and philosopher, Confucius, said centuries before the birth of Christ. He stated that, "our greatest glory is not in never falling, but in rising each time we fall." Recently in history, it was Marilyn Monroe who said that, "Sometimes good things fall apart so better things can fall together."

It is my hope that events like this one will go a long way in educating the public about the need to afford ex-offenders a second chance in life. Our constitution and democratic order is underpinned by the ethos of reconciliation over retribution, and the architects of our freedom had it in their hearts that even those who are in conflict with the law, must be given another chance to succeed in life once they have served their sentences. I urge communities to resist the temptation of imposing a life sentence on ex-offenders by stigmatizing them, ostracizing them, and perpetually judging them instead of assisting them to be fully integrated in our communities upon release.

In the book entitled, *Rethinking Corrections*, the authors Gideon and Loveland argue that, "The people we love to hate are those we know very little about. Most of us admit that we know very little about offenders but simultaneously argue that they should be locked behind bars. Very few lay persons are familiar with current policies or the difficulties released offenders often encounter upon their release."

Ladies and gentlemen, I also want to make an impassioned plea to all Correctional Officials to remember that according to the White Paper on Corrections, each one of them is, first and foremost, a rehabilitator. It is disappointing to learn that there are instances where staff perceptions of incarcerated offenders remain governed largely by unfavourable, stereotypical images of the offenders.

We should all join hands in dispelling the myth that a life behind bars where your freedom is severely curtailed is a desirable life. A community activist and ex-offender, recently reminded me that those who perpetuate the myth that prison is a five star hotel, "either they have

never been in a prison, or they have never been in a five star hotel.”¹ Indeed, the individuals who can lead such a public education campaign to discourage criminal behaviour are offenders, ex-offenders, and parolees themselves.

I appeal to all offenders in our correctional facilities to use all the time they have to turn their lives around, develop themselves educationally and to acquire vocational skills. The majority of offenders are among the least educated members of society. It has been shown that, “people who are incarcerated not only suffer from academic deficiencies but also routinely lack vocational skills needed to obtain and perform adequately in the workforce. Just as academic skills are needed to succeed in life, vocational skills are a must for inmates wanting to provide for themselves and their families. Vocational skills allow inmates to compete for entry-level positions in society once released. As inmates are released back into society, much of their success depends on obtaining and maintaining meaningful employment.”²

Research also shows that, “one of the most immediate areas of concern for inmates upon their release is job-seeking skills such as filling out application forms, developing a resume, and interviewing.”

For a very long time, numerous communities throughout the world showed that they were ill prepared to accommodate those released from Correctional Centres, and that these communities did not have the knowledge and support to do so. Offenders’ reintegration into society has, however, become a popular topic in recent years.

Our country can draw some lessons from the Americans about how they are assisting ex-offenders to be reintegrated back into society through legislation and funding of specific programmes. In due course, I will be discussing such developments with our Minister of Justice and Correctional Services who has already expressed concern about, for instance, the employability of ex-offenders in our country.

¹ Miles Budu

² *Rethinking Corrections*, p. 193

One major advance that has been made regarding rehabilitation and reintegration of offenders in the US is the Second Chance Act, signed by President George W Bush in April 2008. In his 2004 State of the Union Address, President George W. Bush said, "America is the land of the second chance, and when the gates of the prison open, the path ahead should lead to a better life."³

For the first time in decades, Congress was poised to pass a bill that aims to make current offenders' and ex-offenders' lives easier by allocating federal funds for rehabilitation and reentry [reintegration] programs. According to Travis (2005), "Invisible punishments", have been imposed on offenders who are reintegrating back into their communities, putting a wall between the ex-offender and society. For instance, in the US, ex-offenders are denied benefits such as student loans, drivers' licences, welfare, food stamps and public housing eligibility

The Second Chance Act is aimed at providing jobs, education, drug treatment, and other types of aid in the hopes that offenders can help themselves, support their families, and improve society overall. The Second Chance Act expands federal support for adult and juvenile offender reentry demonstration projects and supports post-release drug treatment. This bill and similar legislation is aimed at improving offender reintegration.

Research shows that "reentry [or reintegration] programmes enhance public safety, help prepare offenders for transition to responsible citizenship, can help reduce future criminal behaviour, remove barriers that make it difficult for offenders to reenter their communities, and develop necessary support for the community."

Programme Director, on this day which is Lesotho's national day of independence, allow me to end my talk by dedicating a few verses from Maya Angelou's poem entitled I RISE to our female ex-offenders, all our

³ Information on the Second Act has been extracted and adapted from the book, *Rethinking Corrections*

partners at the Department of Correctional Services, and the Basotho people who taught us that, *Mosadi o tshwara thipa ka bohaleng*.

I RISE

Did you want to see me broken?
Bowed head and lowered eyes?
Shoulders falling down like teardrops,
Weakened by my soulful cries...

Out of the huts of history's shame
I rise
Up from a past that's rooted in pain
I rise
I'm a black ocean, leaping and wide,
Welling and swelling I bear in the tide.

Leaving behind nights of terror and fear
I rise
Into a daybreak that's wondrously clear
I rise
Bringing the gifts that my ancestors gave,
I am the dream and the hope of the slave.
I rise
I rise
I rise.

ENDS!