

Speech by the Minister of Justice & Correctional Services,

Adv. Michael Masutha, MP

2014 Standard Bank Top Women Awards

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Deputy Minister of Small Business Development: Ms. Elizabeth Thabethe

Deputy Minister of Correctional Services: Mr. Thabang Makwetla

Deputy Minister of Tourism Thokozile Xasa

Deputy Minister of State Security Ellen Molekane

Heads of Departments and senior Government Officials

Leaders in corporate South Africa

Representatives from SMMEs and agencies as well as entrepreneurs

Our 2014 Standard Bank Top Women Awards Finalists

Members of the Media

Distinguished Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

I beg your indulgence to break with convention by first boosting the egos of our immaculately dressed ladies, by using a phrase that will upset many men here tonight. They often say if you want something said, ask a man and if you want something done, ask a woman. This expression resonates with the purpose of our event tonight as we will be rewarding excellence displayed by those nominated in various disciplines of human endeavour. The month of August is Women's Month, and the 9th of August was declared Women's Day by our democratically elected government. As you are aware, Women's Day marks the anniversary of the 1956

march to the Union Buildings by over 20 000 women, to protest against the discriminatory pass laws which had restricted the movement of Black people in our country.

This year marks 60 years since the signing of the Women's Charter, on 17th April 1954 in Johannesburg, which called for unity among women with a common objective of removing all political, legal, economic and social barriers towards full participation in society. This year, Women's Month is being commemorated under the theme: "Celebrating the 60th Anniversary of the Women's Charter and 20 Years of Freedom: together moving a non-racial and non-sexist South Africa forward".

From the 20 Year Review, it is clear that we have made some progress in achieving emancipation and equal rights for women in our country even though challenges still persist. Following the recent elections, parliament boasts 45% women representation, an increase from about 42% in 2009. This ranks South Africa third in the world in terms of representation of women in Parliament. However many women continue to remain on the margins of society and are vulnerable to social risks such as violence, abuse, rape, unemployment and poverty.

Renowned poet, the late Maya Angelou once said: *"My mission in life is not merely to survive, but to thrive and to do so with some passion, compassion, humor and style. One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest"*. The 2014 Standard Bank Top Women awards speak directly to her words inspirational words as I believe that our finalists possess these attributes.

As the ANC government, we have developed policies and programmes that seek to improve the living and working conditions of women. In 1997, the Office on the Status of Women was established in the Presidency to steer the national gender programme and championed the development of the National Policy Framework for Women Empowerment and Gender Equality that was approved by Cabinet in 2000. Subsequently, similar structures were established in the Premier's offices. In May 2009, President Jacob Zuma pronounced on the establishment of a Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities. In May 2014, the President evolved the structure to a dedicated Ministry for Women in the Presidency, as a way of elevating women's issues and interests with a view to lead, coordinate and

over-see the transformation agenda on women's socio-economic empowerment. We also have the National Development Plan which is guaranteed to further strengthen the women's agenda. We urge women to rally behind the goals outlined in the NDP eliminating poverty and reducing inequality by 2030.

Program Director

I am alive to the fact that these are Awards with a celebratory ambience which tends to bore one if speeches become too complex to comprehend but allow me to share the situation in our Correctional Centres. Currently, South Africa's inmate population is over 155 000 with 3,737 female offenders. 53 infants are living with their mothers who are incarcerated in our facilities. Some are serving sentences for killing their partners. What is more disturbing is that some of these women are serving time together with their daughters, who assisted them in committing these murders after they themselves were direct or indirect victims of abuse by their fathers. Another group is that of female offenders who have violently acted against other women, due to competition for affection from their male partners. These women need help in dealing with the trauma of experiencing often long-term physical and emotional abuse.

We pride ourselves in the excellent team of our professionals who do exceptional work with these offenders. Our female offenders are thoroughly assessed in order to ensure that they are enrolled in correct programmes that will target the offending behaviour. In addition, we have good working relationships with external service providers who render rehabilitative programmes. Empowerment, meaningful and responsible choices, respect and dignity, supportive environment and shared responsibility, guide the development and delivery of interventions for women offenders. Therefore tonight, we want to acknowledge all Non-Governmental Organizations striving to correct offending behaviour. We would like to recognize and appreciate the significant contributions they make in rehabilitating offenders and preparing them to be better citizens upon their release.

Let us always be mindful that when we empower a woman we empower the family and invariably empower whole nation. In our environment, we have realized that children in a household tend to emulate their mothers hence any preventative strategies significantly reduce chances of more women and men ending up in our facilities. Women's Month seeks to strengthen and showcase partnerships with the private sector and civil society in the promotion of the rights and empowerment of

women. Recognizing Women Top Women achievers is part of enhancing women empowerment and advancement in many ways.

As I conclude, I wish to appeal to our corporate sector to exercise flexibility in their recruitment policies and consider absorbing our rehabilitated parolees because their criminal records should not necessarily be used as a secondary punishment. On our side, we will ensure that we improve the parole system in order to ensure that only fully rehabilitated inmates are released on parole.

Addressing National Women's Day on 9th August 2014, President Zuma said: "*We are doing well in advancing women in business and in the workplace. However, our responsibility goes beyond that. We have to provide an improved quality of life for women in informal settlements, rural villages and townships. For as long as some of them still have to carry buckets of water over long distances and cook with firewood outside their homes because there is no electricity, our work is not yet completed*". These words are a clarion call and indictment to adopt an aggressive stance to women empowerment as well as emphasis on striving for excellence in both public and private sector.

Let us not be oblivious to the fact that as a society we will always be judged by how we contribute to changing lives of many who seek inspiration to turn their lives around. Our finalists are South Africans who have distinguished themselves by striving in various fields to attain excellence and to perform in ways that are comparable to best practices and standards across the world.

Let us stand up for our Champions, because we are a country that does not reward below par performance but applaud those whose performance is par Excellence, Let us stand up for our Top Women achievers, Let us stand up for those whose contribution in defining the 20th Century Woman is beyond reproach!!!!

Let us do so because we all believe this is a sign of victory.

I thank you.