

## **GENDER INEQUALITY AN AFRICAN CHALLENGE IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**

**Party Discussant: Pinky Sharon Kekana, Chair, ANC Women's League**

Programme Director/ Chairperson, distinguished guests, and the house at large. All protocol is duly observed. I extend sincere greetings from my colleagues and the Leadership from South Africa.

Thank you for extending an invitation to the African National Congress Women's League to participate in this important gathering. I extend a hearty thank you for having invited us to this august occasion, being the conference of Socialists and Democrats, a conference comprising of African and European parties, to talk about challenges still facing society on gender inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

***Amandla!***

***Igama la makhosikazi malibongwe!***

At home, South Africa has just concluded the Women's month celebrations. Women across our nation reflected on achievements since the 1956 historic march, where more than 20 000 women took to the streets and marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria (Political Capital) to demand that the then apartheid government abandon their plans for women to carry what we called "the dom pass" (Identity document specifically for black people). This document regulated a person's movement. If you were found without it on your person in an urban area, you could serve a jail term of six months to a year.

61 years on, their efforts are now enjoyed by the young generations and never forgotten. We pay tribute to those heroines of our society, women of strength and character on an annual basis. We take stock of our achievements and reflect on the challenges that still lie ahead!

The subject of this gathering is also a reminder that a lot more should still be done, in this 21<sup>st</sup> century. Technology is so advanced yet there are glaring differences between men and women, girls and boys in our modern societies!

Fellow delegates

***Gender equality, equality between men and women, entails the concept that all human beings, both men and women, are free to develop their personal abilities and make choices without the limitations set by stereotypes, rigid gender roles and prejudices. Gender equality means that the different behaviour, aspirations and needs of women and men are considered, valued and favoured equally. It does not mean that women and men have to become the same, but that their rights, responsibilities and opportunities will not depend on whether they are born male or female. Gender equity means fairness of treatment for women and men, according to their respective needs. This may include equal treatment or treatment that is different but which is considered equivalent in terms of rights, benefits, obligations and opportunities.***

*ABC of Women Worker's Rights and Gender Equality, ILO, Geneva, 2000, p.48.*

In this 21 century, we have a set of instruments that promote women dignity, rights and set out that the rights of women are human rights too. These are the:

- Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)
- The Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action
- AU Heads of State's Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa
- Optional Protocol to the African Charter on the Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa
- The UN Millennium Declaration and its Development Goals (MDGs), the list goes on

Delegates,

Despite these fundamental national and international instruments on gender equality, there are still many barriers and constraints that are slowing progress in achieving a more equal society. As the party we recognise that the legacy of triple oppression of women

cannot be meaningfully addressed without the participation of women in shaping the policy and political programmes of the organisations to address this challenge.

The inclusion of women in the mainstream of society is a pre-requisite to be able to accelerate struggles towards women emancipation. It is thus important that women organisations be charged to be in the forefront of clubs and societies, community initiatives, and social forces that promote women emancipation and overall support to family unit and economic champions.

We also believe that the leadership of all sectors of society (politics, businesses, etc.) must comprise of young people and women leaders. Young people are representatives of our society who must form part of the decision-making forums. Young women in particular have the strength, they know the politics, they are ideologically astute and are developmental agents and will assist to make a meaningful contribution to the implementation of progressive policies towards gender equality.

Delegates

We cannot afford to deny that there is a connection between gender equality and economic growth. Countries that have a high level of gender equality like Sweden have positive economic growth. Various studies have shown the economic Benefits of Gender Equality in the European Union. For example, the European Institute for Gender Equality Director Virginija Langbakk said:

***“Our study proves that gender equality is good for the economy and it cannot be disregarded if the EU wants to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth. For far too long, gender inequalities have been limiting women’s economic opportunities and we now have proof that gender equality is crucial for the entire economy”.***

Fellow delegates

The former Chairperson of African Union Commission, Dr Nkozana Dlamini-Zuma, once said:

**"Women should be given equal opportunities with men in all walks of life. It is important because when you improve the lives of women and you educate them, a lot of things change, not only for that woman, but for the family, for the community and for the country".**

We echo Dr Dlamini-Zuma's call and she has inspired many women in various countries and sectors. Under her leadership the AU developed Agenda 2063, which seeks full gender parity, with women occupying at least 50% of elected public offices at all levels and half of managerial positions in the public and the private sectors.

Colleagues

I want to submit that in the political environment front-Political Parties are significant players in promoting gender equality. However it is unfortunate that Political Parties are also entrenched in gender inequality attitudes. It is a well-known fact that patriarchy is rooted in Political Parties. There are political glass ceilings that restrict women's progress and that have to be shattered.

- **How many political parties in the continent are led by Female Presidents?**
- **How many countries are led by Female Presidents?**

In my own country, South Africa, the only Party in the National Assembly that is led by a woman is the *National Freedom Party*. The rest are led by men. The African National Congress Women's League, which is an integral part of the ANC, resolved that it is time a woman occupies the center stage. The ANCWL resolved that, in the coming elective conference of the ANC, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma is our nominee for the Presidential position.

It is time that she assumes the leadership of the organization and occupy the helm of the oldest liberation movement - the ANC. She is a leader with vast experience and immense knowledge. She has set a good example being the first woman leader in Africa to assume

the leadership of the African Union Commission! She has the education! She has the experience! She has government knowledge as she was a minister in various portfolios! As women we are watching what those opposed to women in leadership will use as an excuse to deter her! For us, we have a suitable candidate!

Delegates,

The struggle to emancipate women is not simply about attitudes but also about dismantling structural inequality and challenging the material basis of women's oppression under the parasitic blood-sucking capitalist system. Many African countries have political freedom but their economies are still in the hands of the former colonisers and the imperialists. We provide raw materials which are processed for us and sold at huge prices as products! Our people are not direct beneficiaries of our rich minerals! They supply labour and receive cheap wages under harsh labour practices!

Poverty affects some 54% of our population, of which the majority are women and children, according to the latest report by Statistics South Africa. Women are excluded from participating in the limited economic activities, rendering them to be economic slaves of men. Discrimination of women in the economic activities is a major barrier to economic growth. No economy can grow when the majority of the population, who are women, are excluded from being active participants in that economy. It will remain a pie in the sky to hope for the growth of Africa's economy when women are perpetually marginalized. Gender discrimination is costly to nations across the globe and forces women to suffer severe emotional and economic repercussions.

Fellow delegates

Gender inequality remains a prevalent feature in many developing countries in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The gap between male and female to access to opportunities exists in many dimensions, in:

- Education,

- Wages,
- Access to formal employment,
- Access to managerial positions,
- Access to business funding, and
- Political representation.

What must be done to address gender inequality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

1. Each African country must establish a Commission for Gender Equality to promote respect for gender equality and protection, development and attainment of gender equality.
2. Gender oppression must be criminalized.
3. Education must be free and compulsory in African countries until undergraduate level. Girls must equally attend schools like boys.
4. Introduce compulsory gender equality curriculum in schools up to undergraduate level.
5. Establish specific Banks to finance exclusively businesses owned by women.
6. Promote collaboration between local communities and financial, political and economic institutions, national authorities and international bodies to influence change and elevate the value of women.
7. African countries must legislate 50/50% gender parity across all sector at all levels.
8. We need to continue with campaigns that raise consciousness about the equal participation of women in the public sphere and leadership trainings.
9. We need to create a conducive environment, thereby eliminating discriminatory laws and practices that reduce women to lesser citizens.
10. We must encourage participation at the highest possible level right away.
11. We have to ensure that we propagate for all political parties to commit to achieving gender parity within the leadership and also in their nomination list of candidates that they put up for elections.

Delegates

The late President of Mozambique, who had dedicated his life to fighting colonialism, exploitation and injustices, President Samora Machel said:

***“The Emancipation of women is not an act of charity, the result of a humanitarian or compassionate attitude. The liberation of women is a fundamental necessity for the revolution, a guarantee of its continuity and a precondition for its victory.”***

The demand for the emancipation of women is not an act of charity. It is a necessity for the liberation of humankind as a whole. It is a struggle to be fought by all. Society cannot leave in peace when young girls and women face genital mutilations, are forced into marriages, are trafficked as sex slaves and face all forms of abuse. More resources must be availed by governments to implement gender equality programs. Talking without availing resources will not change the situation.

**I thank you!!!**