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Remarks of the Minister for Social Development, Ms Lindiwe Zulu, MP

Tuesday, 22 November 2022

On the Occasion of the National Men's Parliament

Parliament

Co-Chairpersons of the Session, Honourable Sylvia Lucas and Kgosi Thabo Seatlholo;
Deputy President of the Republic of South Africa, His Excellency David Mabuza;
Minister of Health, Honourable Dr Joe Phaahla;
Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Honourable Maite Nkoana-Mashabane;
Minister of Police, Honourable Bheki Cele;
Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Honourable Ronald Lamola;
Deputy Minister of Basic Education, Honourable Dr Reginah Mhaule;
Deputy Minister of Police, Honourable Cassel Mathale;
Deputy Minister of Health, Honourable Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo;
Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development, Honourable John Jeffrey;
Honourable Members of the National Council of Provinces;
Deputy Chairperson of the Men's Sector, Dr Matome Kganakga;
Men's Sector Secretary-General, Prof Mbulelo Dyasi;
Chief Executive Officer of Higher Health, Dr Ramneek Ahluwalia;
Chief Executive Officer of the South African National Aids Council, Dr Thembisile Xulu;
Representative of UNAIDS, Mr Nditsheni Mungoni;
Representative of UN Women, Ms Jacqueline Utamuriza-Nzisabira;
Provincial Men's Sector here present;
Traditional and religious leaders here present;
Representatives of our multilateral, civil society and private sector partners;
Distinguished delegates;
Ladies and Gentlemen;
Fellow South Africans; and
Young people.

1. Thank you very much for the opportunity to render these few remarks on the role of men as champions of change in preventing the spread of HIV as well as addressing gender-based violence and femicide in communities to this third biennial National Men's Parliament.
2. On the backdrop of the series of economic, health, social unrest and mental health traumas and shocks that our society and communities have been through in living memory, the National Men's Parliament is an institution that contributes to the important role of socialising the man that is desirable for the South Africa that we are reconstructing towards an inclusive recovery where women and children indeed feel that they belong.
3. Let me join the multitudes of South Africans who truly and deeply relate with Chris Hani: a faithful husband, father, son, brother, role model, self-less and patriotic South African and a courageous man who truly cared for the people of this land and sought for our institutions to understand that South Africa's greatest assets are its people. That is the reason we are meeting to speak with South African men. I would like to say to your gallant spirit: Twenty-nine years after your courageous life was cut very short, we still look up to you with admiration because no law can regulate one's love for another person. Love is not a subject of impersonal rationalisation of any form. The majority of South Africans love you because you loved them.
4. Having said that, please allow me to cite Frederick Douglas when he said [I quote] It is easier to build strong children than repair broken men [Unquote].
5. I would like to start by thanking my colleague, the Deputy Minister of Social Development, the Honourable Hendrietta Bogopane-Zulu for her vigorous campaign and leadership in making the National Men's Parliament a standing feature on the making this possible.

6. This year's National Men's Parliament could not have come at a better time. At the beginning of this month, His Excellency President Cyril Ramaphosa hosted the second Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide. At the Summit, President Ramaphosa made a clarion call on all men to take a stand to prevent and eliminate the pandemic of gender-based violence which has become a [and I quote] shameful indictment of the men of this country [Unquote].
7. We are pleased that the National Men's Parliament Programme of Action constitutes a concrete contribution to the actualisation of the key recommendations of the Presidential Summit, and particularly to the implementation of the pillars of the National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide. One of the key tasks in preventing gender-based violence in all its forms is to enlist the active participation of men in all communities throughout the fifty-two district and metropolitan municipalities of our country. Consequently, it is encouraging to see the participation of the men who have voiced their commitment to non-violence.
8. I was privileged two weeks ago to be invited to the Men's Walk Against Gender-Based Violence, an event organised by The Goodmen Foundation. This is intended at inspiring men from all walks of life to speak out and act against all forms of violence against women and children in particular, and fellow human-beings in general. At that event, His Majesty, King Misuzulu kaZwelithini made an impassioned plea for a joint national effort that is dedicated towards grooming boys and young men into becoming good and responsible men, brothers, uncles, fathers and leaders of our society. Further, His Majesty stressed the need for boys to have positive role models that confront toxic forms of masculinity, misogyny and rigid gender stereotypes upon which the culture of violence against women and children in our families, communities and society is being perpetuated.
9. Toxic masculinity puts pressure on boys to be tough and emotionless. These societal constructs of what it means to "be a man" are extremely harmful to the boys who are being socialised into them, to the men that they become, to our families and to all of society. This is the ground upon which the multiple forms of sexism, violence, and untreated mental health issues in boys and men as they are being discouraged from seeking help and to "man-up" are bred.

10. We can all play a part in dismantling the stigma around mental health by supporting men to access psycho-social support services, particularly mental health support. It is really important that we do that because men in general are less likely to seek assistance when faced with family, health, societal, and economic challenges. It is particularly important that we have met here over the last two days to foreground men's agenda and to reflect on the state of the South African men. Gone are the days when men were only seen as providers or disciplinarians in families. Men have a critical role to play, particularly with respect to correctly nurturing and socialising their children.
11. Following up on the recommendation of the National Men's Summit held in 2018, the Department of Social Development, working jointly with SANAC Men's Sector started implementing the Men Championing Change Programme under the banner of Takuwani Riime Men's Movement.
12. The Men Championing Change Programme is about highlighting and encouraging positive masculinity and the positive male role models in our lives and society — these are men such as yourselves in this Parliament and many others who bring value to our families, communities and country. The men who champion change help in the fight against the multiple social challenges such as HIV, substance abuse and child pregnancies. They are not part of these problems. They are on the side of the positive solutions.
13. Due to the need for action in local communities, the Department has partnered with National House of Traditional and Khoi-San Leaders to address harmful practices such as ukuthwala and other practices that undermine the rights of women and the girl-child under the guise of culture. One of the initiatives of this partnership is the Traditional Men's Parliament.

14. The need to attend to the manifestation of mental health issues among boys and men is with us right here. In fact, it may be overdue. As a result, social investments need to be directed towards it. Phrases such as “You are not a man enough” are destroying our society in as much as they reproduce the violent environment that is enveloping us. Real solutions that go to the heart of manhood are needed. This starts with building safe spaces by men, for men and with men.
15. The perceptions of being overlooked when employment and empowerment opportunities arise are real among men. Than these frustrations turning into violent expressions, we need alternative avenues and language to attend to their lived reality. It is for this reason that we started to roll out the Men’s Lounges in the different provinces. Currently, we have Men’s Lounges that are linked to Community Care Centres in the KwaZulu-Natal, North West and Limpopo provinces. We are planning to roll out more Men’s Lounges in all provinces.
16. We do know that many men do not abuse their partners and children. These are the men who continuously strive to embody respect and dignity. As I close, I want to leave you with this message: In your homes and communities, let us emulate the principled example that Chris Hani lived as a husband, father, son, brother, leader and role model for the millions of people who remember him as if they had a personal relationship with him. That is the leader who protects and natures. That is a patriot.

I thank you.

