South Africa Public Service initiatives to Promote Gender Equality and Women Empowerment.

Speech delivered by Prof. Richard Levin, Director-General for Public Service and Administration, “the 1st Gender Indaba 2008” on the 18th & 19th August 2008, Birchwood.

Programme Director
Deputy President of South Africa, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
Minister for Public Service and Administration, Ms Fraser-Moleketi
Burundian Vice Minister of Human Rights and Gender, Ms Rose Nduwayo
MEC for Gauteng Education, Ms Angie Motshega.
AU Commission Director of Women, Gender and Development, Ms Litha Musyimi -Ogana
UNIFEM Regional Director, Ms Nomcebo Manzini
Representative from South African Human Rights Commission, Ms Matsolo Matooane
Representative from South African Women in Dialogue, Ms Girlie Njoni
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen

It is such a privilege for me today, to be part of a legacy within this current term of office of our Minister, a revered first generation Gender activist, to account to you, the Public Service Gender machinery, on what we have done so far towards gender equality and women’s empowerment. I read daily in the newspapers, advertisements and notices of all the gender initiatives, in the month of August and see how line departments have heeded the Minister’s call to dedicate August as women’s month, to the Public Service gender programme. I am sure that you have held your HOD’s accountable in the past year, since the launch of the HOD 8 Principle Plan of Action for Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. We will hear from you in the next two days how you have established your Women
Management Forums to ensure the implementation of the eight principles of action. We will celebrate with you your achievements in all your novel initiatives in your workplace which occurred and will occur during your dedicated Women Management week.

As an HOD responsible for leading by example, I stand before you and posit to you, that all HODs nationally should be regarded by virtue of their position, automatically as the new concept, called an accounting Gender Focal Point (GFP) similar to their role as the accounting officer, where the CFO is still the bean counter and hence the GFP is still the grindstone to drive gender equality and empowerment within the place. This may sound revolutionary, but if we are charged with ensuring the implementation of the 8 principles for gender equality and women empowerment as part of our performance agreements, then we must take full responsibility and account for all the following decisions with respect to our departmental strategic plans:

1. Transformation for non sexism,
2. Establishing a Policy environment
3. Meeting equity targets
4. Creating an enabling environment
5. Mainstreaming gender
6. Empowerment of Women
7. Providing adequate human, physical and financial resources, and
8. Accountability, reporting, monitoring and evaluation.

Imagine if the Auditor General’s Report had to account for these issues- I am sure this will fast-track transformation and we will see many more male HODs present at all future Gender Indabas. Immediately after the month of August, line departments will be requested by the dpsa to account for how far they have gone in implementing the gender equality strategies emanating from the HOD’s 8 principles of action. We would have to account to Cabinet thereafter, as the
March 2009 deadline for the mission critical target of 50% to be reached, looms large. We would have to report as to whether your department and the public service as a whole, has reached this noble feat. Ever sinew has to be strained in an effort and attempt to put in extraordinary measures within all departments that have not as yet reached their target.

Our Minister for Public Service and Administration has just launched earlier today, the Gender Equality Strategic Framework, after broad consultation with all line departments, after the draft was launched at the 16 Days of Activism to Prevent Violence Against Women. The generic implementation plan will drive and ensure that all line departments engage in targeted initiatives to institutionalize the HOD 8 principle plan of action.

Whilst the dpsa is at the forefront of gender mainstreaming at a public policy level, the baton for driving the action learning to ensure capacity development of all women within the public service will have to be carried by our sister department, PALAMA (formerly SAMDI). The HRD Strategic Framework for the Public Service expects capacity development programmes to be designed within a supporting enabling environment at organizational level. Governance structures to track development of women, is a bedrock of this empowerment strategy. Economic growth and Development initiatives must target marginalized women through sector policies and resource distribution with specific reference to rural women.

The role of the OPSC must be commended for monitoring and reporting against progress for the public service in the implementation of Gender policies and gender mainstreaming training provided. The OSW in the Presidency, on the other hand has provided strategic direction in their overarching role in coordinating gender issues nationally and internationally. The National Gender Machinery also adds to the valuable network that has been initiated at a national level and cascaded to our respective provinces in our country South Africa.
As a country, we believe that there are advances in gender equality and women empowerment in the public service in South Africa, since 1994. The following shopping list of achievements, needs to be highlighted:

- Equal opportunities for women and men on issues such as access to education, health, housing, land, employment and other basic needs.
- Making provision through policies, programmes and strategies to redress existing imbalances between men and women.
- Increased economic growth and inclusion of women in the mainstream economy of the country.
- Recognition of women’s contribution to the economy and society through their unpaid work in the care economy;
- Development of effective institutional framework from a national level to local levels;
- National Gender Machineries were set up to assist in the realization of the full equality that has been guaranteed to women, such as the Human Rights Commission (today well known as SAHRC), the Commission on Gender Equality (CGE), the Office on the Status of Women (OSW) before it was in the President’s Office only. But today we are proud to let the people know that in 8 Provinces we have successfully institutionalized the OSW in the Office of the Premiers which are fully operational and part of the NGM. Gauteng Province however, has always had an office driving gender issues but under a different name. Nonetheless, they have successfully implemented gender equality and empowerment for women within that Province;
- The Justice sector has passed laws which protect women against domestic violence and the courts provide protection to vulnerable women. Today extensive research has been put in place to assist the public service especially the social sectors and the justice sectors to improve
their performance in order to assist in eradication of violence against women and children.

- Legislation to improve the collection of maintenance from errant partners and fathers has been passed, though not satisfactory implemented. Our justice system is going an extra mile to make sure this policy is fully implemented and the well being of a child is put first. This will continue to be the priority of the public service and the country at large.

- Rape in marriages has been recognized as rape and a woman is no more seen like a minor.

- Sexual harassment in the workplace has been dealt with decisively and strategies have been put in place to protect all women from physical and psychological abuse and manipulation in the workplace;

- It is in this public service that women has been recognized and policies on paid maternity and family responsibility leave has been implemented and fully operational;

- Women can acquire property and economically protect their dependants;

- The discrimination suffered by women living under customary and/or tribal law has been raised by the department of Home affairs and is receiving attention by the DoJ who is playing a crucial role in assisting women especially those who lack information and who are living in rural areas.

- Specialized rape courts have been introduced with more gender sensitive court procedures, aimed at giving women rape victims more assistance from the SAPS, Clinics and the judiciaries.

- The Education sector had engendered all curriculum materials and given specific support to the development of the girl-child in achieving her full potential in the maths and sciences.

- The reproductive rights of women have been well served by the Department of Health and the roll-out of ARVs to mothers infected with the HIVirus is receiving urgent attention.
Foreign Affairs and the Department of Defense has played a major role in the mediation of post war conflict with specific reference to the plight of women in these war-torn situations.

Our country has become a signatory to the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), without reservation;

Our government has committed itself to the plan of action coming out of the Beijing Women’s Conference of 1995, which specifically addressed poverty and related problems among women internationally, and has developed our own plans, strategies and policies;

Our government has prioritized the Millennium Development Goals (MDG’s) of which the set date to achieve some of this principles is the 2015, if we put our heads together and help each other we can make it.

We have prioritized the National and International days and have used these days as a way of taking stock with the broader gender community. (8th March, International Women’s Day, 21st March – Human Rights Day, 9th August – National Women Day whereby the month of August is declared as a dedicated women’s month; 25th Nov-16 Dec marks the campaign of 16 days of Activism against Violence against Women which was extended to 356 days of no violence against women and children) and many more where gender equality and women empowerment has been promoted.

It is within this public service where the employer has introduced the GEMS medical aid, which is mostly used by women and dependents of their families within the public sector.

Cabinet had initiated the 30% target of women in SMS position, which has been achieved by 31st March 2005, and later was revised and expected to reach the 50% mark by March 2009.

Women managers within the public service are a force to reckon with and are breaking ground in management discipline. I take that business
unusual has been practiced moreover when we see that women are now in decision making levels in the public service;

- The public service has also lobbied for the inclusion and integration of people and women with disabilities.
- It is this government where we introduced the preferential procurement policy, where women do have special ratings in order to access tenders of government.
- Women are now in those sectors, which were previously dominated by men; such as engineering stream, technology, etc.
- Gender budget statement has been dealt with, even though we need more depth consultation on the area.

The list of outstanding initiatives where the public service has ensured a **better life for all women** is too long, but there is still more to be done before the majority of South African women can claim to be empowered and have uninhibited access to progress.

The public service must moves beyond equality of opportunities but rather strive to achieve equality of outcomes, by recognizing the different and disparate needs and constraints of women and men, girls and boys in different socio-economic settings and put different strategies in place to address them in order to bridge the gap. We have to ensure that the public service policies, strategies and programmes are free from both explicit gender discrimination and that they promote gender equality and mainstreaming.

**Conclusion**

This 1st Gender Indaba will be a further milestone as you continue to develop the public service gender best practice plan of action which fosters and strengthens relationships at all levels and contributes to a gender equal and woman empowered work environment.
I trust that the following two days will be an empowering experience for each participant in this Gender Indaba. I also urge the public service departments to continue the commitment and make this Indaba an annual priority where consultation, monitoring and evaluation will progress. The role of coordination of the overarching office cannot be over emphasized in driving the country gender agenda.

I thank you