The Role of Women in the Development of the Public Service

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At the Inaugural Public Service Gender Indaba; with the theme:
“Engendering Public Service Policy”
Birchwood Hotel (Boksburg)
Programme Director
Deputy President of South Africa, Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka
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
Prof. Richard Levin, Director-General, DPSA
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

As we assemble here today, we embrace the inaugural Public Service Gender Indaba, which marks an important era of Public Service Policy agenda in a context of patriarchy, decentralisation of the Public Service, globalisation and the challenge of re-affirming a democratic state. It creates an opportunity for women to engage in public service policy that is developed and implemented in a context that is not free from the challenges of patriarchy, globalisation and the quest for the advancement of a democratic state.

More specifically, this Indaba seeks to contribute to the analysis of the relationship between women’s policy machinery, and organised women’s formation in the Public Service. Over the past 14 years of administration and democracy, government has engaged with the enormous task of transforming both the country and the public service to embrace the national priorities of development and economic growth, inclusive of gender equality and women empowerment. After interpreting the challenges faced, the Public Service had to align to the processes that would ensure efficiency, effectiveness and efficacy. We have seen the significant contribution of women to this end, being
participatory in the development of a transformed Public Service that is representative of all people in South Africa.

The Indaba thus seeks to make a deliberate pronouncement of the need to have a Public Service Gender forum, that evaluates the capacity and role of women to facilitate linkages between the government structures, and to support successful policy interventions within the Public Service, that will result in gender sensitive public policy. It attempts to evaluate the contributions of women, and their changing roles, in the development of an effective Public Service.

As we embrace the honour of creating this platform in 2008, we remember that, sixty years ago, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as a bulwark against oppression and discrimination. In the wake of a devastating world war, which had witnessed some of the most barbarous crimes in human history, the Universal Declaration marked for the first time that the rights and freedoms of individuals were set forth in such detail.

It also represented the first international recognition that human rights and fundamental freedoms are applicable to every person, including every woman, everywhere. In this sense, the Universal Declaration was a landmark achievement in world history, the world’s feminist history and gender equality included. Today, it continues to affect people's lives and inspire human rights activism and legislation all over the world.

The success of the endeavours of the early champions of human rights of 60 years ago, is demonstrated by the virtually universal acceptance of the Declaration. Today, the Universal Declaration, translated into nearly 350 national and local languages, is the best known and most cited human rights document in the world. The foundation of international human rights law, the Universal Declaration serves as a model for numerous international treaties and declarations and is incorporated in the constitutions and laws of many countries, including our own. We can best pay tribute to these pioneering endeavours by
deliberating frankly and seriously on the issues of engendering Public Service policy as also human rights issues.

Equal access of men and women to power, decision-making and leadership at all levels is a necessary pre-condition for the proper functioning of democracy. This is enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which recognises the right of every person to take part in the government of his or her country. This is also a fundamental principle reflected in the Bill of Rights of the Constitution of South Africa.

In my capacity as the Chairperson of the Ministers for Public Service (Pan-Africa); I have conceptualised the convening of regional dialogues on the situation of women in post-conflict countries, in the process of reconstruction and development. There are initiatives underway to work with Burundi to host a Gender Roundtable to deliberate on issues that will bring about recommendations, to ensure that post-conflict reconstruction and development processes are engendered. This will assist in facilitating interventions that will guarantee that the differing needs of women and men affected by conflict are adequately addressed through policy and programmes at country level.

As we remember the heroic work of the drafters of the Human Rights Charter, those who marched on August 9\(^{th}\) 1956, we need to creatively develop models to analyse the impact of women's movements on state activities in our democracy. History has shown several brave women who have sacrificed for the nation and have been freedom fighters. Histories, such as these, help us to understand the present, to plan for the future, and to build a diverse, multi-talented and equitable community of women public servants.

This Indaba takes place in the month of August, which is National women’s month. A month when we remember heroines of the struggle against racism and patriarchy, who marched against pass system of which was part of Public Service legislation and Policy that was discriminatory and dehumanising. Since
the turn of the century, women in South Africa have emerged as primary catalysts for protests against, and as challengers of, the apartheid regime. These remarkable women; some of whom were Public Servants either as professionals or general workers offering supportive services in the Public Service, embraced the need for social and economic freedom. We acknowledge and recognise the role they played in the transformation process that led to the democratic changes, which in effect is cascaded to the Public Service today.

In the few past decades, a dramatic increase in the number of women participating in the labour force has taken place; this has also been evident in the Public Service. Since early history and the ancient civilization of man, women have played a secondary role, in which women were viewed in the role of caregiver and not part of society’s economic thrust.

Many women today, aspire to independence and self-sustenance, and want to significantly contribute to the functioning of the Public Service. Although women in the workplace have encountered massive obstacles, they have contributed and still continue to contribute effectively to the workplace. Through their determination, women have been a driving force in the enactment of laws to protect themselves, and eradicate all historical patriarchal impediments in the workplace. These laws were not just for gender discrimination but also included discrimination based on martial status, pregnancy, race, disabilities, sexual preference, and age.

Women’s employment chances have also been strengthened by Employment Equity legislation and other employment and labour laws which, amongst others, have strengthened women’s retention in the labour force. South Africa is fortunate to have a government in power that has the political will to radically improve the conditions of women in all spheres of life.
The Public Service, for the first time since democracy, has more women in positions of senior responsibility. Even though the numbers do not reflect the desired gender equity status at this stage, much has been achieved and more women will earn their rightful place in the Public Service as we continue to empower and acknowledge their contribution and the significant role they play. Public Service policies are geared to improving the working conditions of women and their empowerment so that they can truly benefit from their efforts.

Our understanding of the present-day contribution of women in the Public Service, depends on an understanding of their past roles and the restrictions of work placed upon them. Despite the difficulties of prejudice and adversity, women have contributed significantly to the development and history of the Public Service through the various roles they have played. These roles include as teachers, nurses and various other occupations within the Public Service. Women continue to participate in shaping the strategies of the Public Service and ensure that their role and contribution is validated and valued.

I see the objective of this Indaba as that of promoting and raising awareness of women's role in the Public Service, which supports key area of economic growth, creates a policy environment and opportunities to support the development of women. This means that the vision is to create an environment where women and men meaningfully participate in ensuring that the work of the Public Service is taken forward. Forums such as this conference will assist the women to reflect on their role to equalise their opportunities to participate in decision-making.

Today there is not a single field, where women do not play a role. Women play an immensely important a role in the development of any nation. They have an ability to form networks that haul together and support other women; either in the Public Service workplace or in communities. These kinds of networks provide a creative platform to develop women, as well as to empower others, to work
towards the Public Service goals, which facilitates opportunities to promote growth.

There is a saying: “if you want to develop a nation, you must develop the leadership capabilities of a woman.” This indicates that women have animate abilities to develop others. It is important that women’s participation is increased in all key decision-making levels in order to increase the impact of their contribution in developing others and the Public Service in general. We would be at fault if we do not take advantage of this and ensure that we harness and provide opportunities for decision-making amongst women. Women's commitment to their work should be reflected in equitable representation.

The Public Service works to promote the needs of women and recognises that women face certain challenges in the workplace. The workplace is constantly evolving to reflect what is relevant in the world of work today. This therefore calls for us as women leaders to continually review our policies to reflect the current realities and challenges that women are potentially faced with. It needs us to reflect on our policies and ensure that they are gender sensitive and responsive to ensure that women play their role within the Public Service with ease.

In the Public Service, women's presence is felt and their voice is heard. Although there has been progress in understanding the role and value of women's contributions in the workplace, there are still challenges to address. We have seen how women continue to be represented in higher echelons of decision-making in the Public Service.

The number of female Heads of Department (HoDs) in the Public Service has increased, where in the past the HoD level was almost exclusively male dominated. This shows that government is committed and confident that women also have a role to play and to provide strategic leadership in the Public Service.
It is evident that women play a critical role in the workplace; more specifically the role played by women in contributing to the efficiency and effectiveness of the Public Service. We therefore need to provide an enabling environment for women to fully participate without any obstacles. We need to ensure that our policies are fully engendered to accommodate the needs of women at various levels.

It is germane to continually strengthen the capacity and mobilise resources that support women in the Public Service, which will enable them to engage effectively in promoting a transformed workplace. The Public Service needs to develop and enhance the capacity for the implementation of gender responsive budgets. There is a need to strengthen and give priority to financing in order to further the advancement of women in the Public Service.

It is within this context that we have developed the Gender Equality Strategic Framework for the Public Service, which I am proudly launching today. The intent of the strategic framework is to advance an effective enabling environment within the Public Service through the adoption of progressive policies, establishment of relevant institutional mechanisms and development of key operational processes to ensure a transformed, non-discriminatory and fully inclusive Public Service, which reflects the Constitutional values of non-sexism and non-racialism. The objective of the framework is to outline a strategic approach for gender equality within the Public Service through a mainstreaming strategy.

Although women are more concentrated in non-decision making positions within the Public Service, the strategic framework is aimed at ensuring that there is focused empowerment and capacity development for women in order for them to be prepared for decision making positions. Furthermore; this is a cornerstone for women empowerment. It aims to co-ordinate the integration and adoption of gender mainstreaming and ensuring the removal of systemic barriers to women’s involvement thereby achieving balanced gender participation.
This framework further ensures that gender issues are integrated into decision-making, implementation, monitoring and evaluation at national, local and corporate governance levels. The focus on creating gender-responsive policies and budgets; providing gender-responsive services and sex disaggregated monitoring and evaluation are other measures that make the Public Service attractive to women.

I believe that, this Strategic Framework will afford enhanced capacity for women to assert their capabilities and full potential in the workplace. It provides targeted initiatives, which deal with the elimination of gender disparities in accessing resources and opportunities. It is imperative that we take forward the agenda for promoting equality and empowerment through the institutionalisation of the Heads of departments’ 8-Principles Action Plan to promote gender equality that is advocated in this strategy.

On 27th August 2007, during the launch of the Heads of Departments 8-Principle Action Plan for Promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment, which is the integral part of the this strategic framework, I indicated that “Gender equality can only be achieved through addressing women’s unique practical needs as employees. All policies, programs and projects affect women and men differently at the workplace.” This signifies that for women to fully acknowledge their role and act on it; there needs to be empowerment programmes that are geared towards advancing women in the Public Service. Women will meaningfully participate when gender sensitive policies and programmes are designed, implemented and monitored to ensure that they result in true empowerment and advancement in the workplace.

I trust that the public service will be able to meet its strategic goal of transforming the state into a non-sexist one by making sure that we prioritise efforts to reach the target of 50% target of women in senior management position. We must
continue to support women, and capacitate them to ensure that we retain them in those positions.

Later today, I will award the Women Senior Managers who have been nominated by their departments for their outstanding work. We need to recognise their contributions and congratulate them for their achievements; this will motivate all women to continue to dedicate themselves and to meaningfully contribute to the course.

In conclusion, as we blow our whistles today, I would like to call a “Letsema,” where we should gather together as a nation to take the work of women in the Public Service forward. (MINISTER ALLOWS TIME FOR EVERYONE TO BLOW THEIR WHISTLES PROVIDED IN THEIR CONFERENCE BAGS) I call upon all, to support the work of women and continue to develop a Public Service that is proud to serve our citizens. We should roll up our sleeves and get down to doing what we are called to do as the Public Service.