



PARLIAMENT
OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

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**CHAIRPERSON, Ms REFILWE MTSWENI-TSIPANE ADDRESS ON THE
OCCASION OF THE PAN AFRICAN PARLIAMENT WOMEN'S CAUCUS**

25 JULY 2025

MIDRAND

**ROLE OF AFRICAN PARLIAMENTS IN ADVANCING WOMEN'S
STATUS AND GENDER EQUALITY**

- Programme Director
- Chairperson of Women's Caucus
- Hon Members of PAP present
- Distinguished guests
- Ladies and Gentlemen

Good day/ Afternoon

INTRODUCTION

- We extend warm greeting on behalf of the Parliament of South Africa, as we welcome opportunity afforded to us to brief this Caucus, on South Africa's chairing the G20 and hosting the G20 Speakers' Summit (P20) from 01 to 03 October 2025
- Of importance, to this Caucus and the Pan African Parliament in general, is exactly the meaning, significance and benefit of this hosting for the first time on African soil
- As expected and anticipated, this has been a subject of much opinion and debate, both domestically and around certain quotas on continent
- It is thus the intention of our Parliament, to provide high level debriefing to this Caucus, on matters related to the *role of African Parliaments, in advancing the women's status and gender equality*
- In our considered view, a unique opportunity is provided to co-host the G20 Speakers' Summit as a united front, pursuing an Africa centered Women's agenda, for total emancipation
- To this extent, it presents an opportunity to re-assert a paradigm shift that advances women's empowerment across Africa.

- In our mission to place Africa's re-definition, re-building and women empowerment center stage on the global stage, we aim to *seize the moment*, in championing reforms, **as a necessity of the Now**
- In so doing, enact forms of parliamentary diplomacy that grapple with the perennial questions of injustice, impoverishment and the continued marginalization of women
- It is an opportunity to confront worlds, that are systematically structured by logics of difference, that reproduce classification along the line of race, class, gender, geographic location, religion, language and so on
- A moment that invites space to reprioritize African specific issues, challenges and solutions, towards social justice and socio-economic equality
- Thematized, as the **Harnessing of parliamentary diplomacy for the realization of global solidarity, equality and sustainability**; this Caucus of women parliamentarians, is occasioned with the space to elevate our parliamentary influence and re-create transformative change
- This is a change that can inaugurate another order of things, a doing of things differently, across the continent and globe

- The Nigerian gender scholar and sociologist, **Oyeronke Oyewumi**, underscores this orientation, as ensuring an epistemic shift, in the categories of gender, as *mere* social impositions
- It is that women's bodies in particular and bodies in general, can no longer be the founded on social thought, that ensures social roles of inclusion or exclusion
- We thus insist on re-animating thought, in ways that challenge body based reasoning and biological determinism, as root causes of gender inequality and gender based oppression
- Thus as, **Oyewumi** elaborates, the presence of gender constructs cannot be separated from the ideology of biological determinism
- Meaning, sexist conceptual schemes have become so widespread that almost all policies, laws, and scholarship- even by Africans, utilizes gendered categories unquestioningly
- Thus, through the opportunities of the P20 Chairmanship, re-examination of the very concepts and laws underpinning and shaping discourse in Africa and across the globe, can no longer be left unaccounted

- Consequently, those in positions of power find it imperative to establish their superior biology as a way of affirming their privilege and dominance over others
- Those who are perceived different are seen as genetically inferior and in turn, used to account for their disadvantaged social position
- In this stead, it has created, (as subject of concern to this Caucus) a society that emerges from conceptions constituted by male and female bodies.
- Honorable Members, the effect of this phenomenon, is the historical creation of a *gendered gaze* – whose root cause is confronting African Parliaments' today
- In this regard, African parliaments are key players to unlock this anomaly, having serious implications for life chances, creating barriers for possibilities of self-determination
- Our unwavering quest on this global stage, towards gender equality and empowerment, seeks the resurgent idea, *that change is possible*
- Hence, the decision of Parliament South Africa, to co-convene the buildup activities in the run up to the P20 with PAP, as a significant commitment for Africa unity, *in this case*, with a gendered perspective

- Through the Gender Committee, the Women's Caucus, PAP shall lead the charge and course of gender struggles and the rights of women
- To this end, we envision a continental perspective, that makes audible, the choices that have been *liminal*, whose outcomes must reach the length and breadth of ordinary communities across Africa

CONTEXT

- African-American Marxist and feminist political activist, **Angela Davis**, alluded, that under colonialism up to the present, African women's social, religious, constitutional and political privileges and rights disappeared, while economic exploitation continued and intensified
- Labor in Africa redefined men's work as modern while constituting women's work as traditional and backward
- The deterioration in the status of women's work, was bound up with loss of rights to set own standards of what work had merit and what did not
- This set the scene for gender income inequality and poverty, being embodied as women
- Which means, part of our task, is contesting these essentialist notions of gender within Africa itself and in the West

- We must unmask structures, institutions and values that re-produce a toxic society at war with itself, through the very subjectivities of both men and women
- ***We can no longer close our eyes*** to these existential questions that define the quality of life and destroys our human spirit.
- ***We can no longer close our eyes*** sexist patriarchy that informs much policy formulation and resource budgeting undermining the status of women through systemic separate development

PRIORITIES

- Key (P20) strategic opportunities allows Parliaments to share best practices in legislation, oversight and public engagement
- This includes gender equality legislation, mechanisms that oversee government programmes, and parliamentary initiatives ensuring meaningful participation of women in policy development
- The P20 further provides opportunity notwithstanding, to advocate increased funding for empowerment programmes across Africa, in climate change, healthcare, education, trade and in building public economies

- Climate change and gender integration in particular, as opportunity to address disproportionate impacts of climate change on women and girls, promotes full participation in solution building
- Thus, intends to elevate women's voices and visibility in global governance, and secure resources for continental development in establishing policies and enacting laws, that benefit women across the continent
- In accordance, we must also contend with the fact of systemic barriers that limit full women participation in society
- We shall therefore, working together as parliaments, continue to call for effective interventions aimed at empowering women to further participate in political sphere
- The case of Rwanda with highest levels of women's representivity in Parliament on the continent is quite indicative
- In drawing from the feminist movement of the 60s and 70s, to us, *the Personal is Political and the Political is Personal*

- We shall therefore continue to promote and observe implementation of the *African Union Convention on Ending Violence against Women and Girls*, adopted in February 2025
- This is an important legal instrument, aimed at ending all forms of violence against women and girls
- To this end, our programmatic attitude through the P20 forum is to mobilize a more unified multifaceted approach that challenges women marginalization
- It is a closer look at the legal and institutional barriers that prevent women from equal employment
- An examination and review of some of the civil, customary and religious systems of law governing daily lives of women, particularly rural women
- On economic exclusion globally, women still earn less than men. In 92 economies, women lack legal provisions mandating equal pay for work of equal value
- There also remains limitations in Reproductive Autonomy.
- In sub-Saharan Africa, only 36% of women have full decision making power compared to 87% in Europe.

- In this way, women continue to be denied power over their bodies, compromising rights, health and well-being
- Justice barriers continue to prevent women accessing justice.
- Legal fees for divorce, inheritance, domestic violence cases are expensive
- This requires the agenda for access to justice, be situated as essential ingredient for equality
- Hence, our strategic imperatives is for legislative reform and harmonization- building legal foundation towards more comprehensive legal framework development; employment and labor rights reform, GBV prevention and response, land rights and property legislation that pays attention to equal access and ownership rights
- Parliament Gender Committees and Women's Caucus therefore represent critical Institutions and function
- The said Committees, should develop and improve analytical capabilities, to scrutinize national budgets through a gender lens
- This includes establishing monitoring mechanisms that track implementation of related legislation and conventions

- In addition, the strengthening of engagement with civil society cannot be understated, through regular engagements dedicated to rights and protection of women and deepening grassroots representation
- We must streamline gender sensitive and gender disaggregated outcomes across government sectors, in ways that invest in statistical capacity and data quality assurance
- To this end, PAP and the SADC-Pf are valuable platforms for learning and sharing best practices and access to comparative experiences

BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

- An opportunity is being created through P20, *to carve ourselves into being*
- An opportunity is created for the groundwork out of which, according to political thinker **Sara Motta**; *we might weave our liberation*
- It is war that has been waged for over 500 years *against women, our daughters, our sisters, our mothers, grandmothers and ourselves*
- We speak in the tradition of racialized women who know how our philosophizing has been cut like diamonds

- We thus call for gender solidarity amongst women and men, to create out of our wounds, a healing and reparative process
- We shall no longer hide; We shall speak in our tongues and on our terms.
- IT IS TIME FOR THE WORLD TO LISTEN
- As Parliamentarians, our challenge is to break the cycle of poverty; understanding we are the leaders we have been waiting for.
- THIS IS OUR EMANCIPATORY HEALING; TOWARDS A DIFFERENT BEGINNING
- Nkosi Sikelela i-Afrika

We thank you