



defence

Department:  
Defence  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

**KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY MINISTER OF DEFENCE  
AND MILITARY VETERANS, HONOURABLE  
NOSIVIWE MAPISA-NQAKULA AT THE  
CELEBRATION OF WOMEN'S MONTH THROUGH  
THE TRANSFORMATION AND GENDER  
CONFERENCE HELD AT AIR FORCE BASE  
SWARTKOP – THABA TSHWANE.**

The Secretary for Defence, Dr Sam Gulube

Chief of the SANDF, General Solly Shoke

Members of the Plenary Defence Staff Council

Generals and Admirals

Our Women members of staff, and those serving

Participants of to this Conference

Members of the Media

It is my honour to be invited to address this forum on a significant, but often undermined matter in this organisation in which we serve. In 2013 the theme for a similar conference was “Promoting Gender Deliberations In Order to Find Common Ground in the DOD”. That theme was well thought through because it simply challenged us to continue finding convergence,

dialogue with each other to find common ground on issues of gender in a military environment like ours. Finding common ground on any matter let alone gender issues is not as easy as it may seem.

This is not only an issue for woman in the defence force but the entire organisation, and in particular at the most senior level where decisions are made. This therefore means that tackling issues of gender is not a matter reserved for the mostly affected but the entire institutions like ours.

Much as we have outlined a number of interventions in our Gender Mainstreaming Strategy in the DOD, our progress and expression of commitment in institutionalising gender empowerment remains slow.

Our level of integrating gender issues in our systems has not reach the required levels of satisfaction. You can be forgiven to think that as this is a male dominated organisation, we cannot integrate gender issues in the organisation, but the opposite is the truth.

We are required by law to attend to gender mainstreaming. As outlined in the DOD gender mainstreaming programme, a lot can be done and achieved if there is a will.

Our progressive legal framework as country, that which provides for both the protection and promotion of women's rights, with an attempt to address that historically disadvantaged and subordinate position of women, has been hailed as one of the major successes for South Africa. In spite of having placed equality on the statute books, in general this has not served a normative function and has yet to lead to a change in the experiences of many South African women.

Writing in the Strategic Review of Southern Africa, Volume 36 No 2, November 2014, Yolanda Sadie of the University of Johannesburg, states that in the ensuing years of our democracy, "women's equality... has not resulted in the liberation of black and rural women in particular. Women's subordination, which is reflected... in the gender gap in employment, the

poverty of women, and the failure of laws to address the high rate of violence against women can mainly be attributed to the enduring patriarchal norm that underlie the uneven power relations between women and men “. Therefore, without understanding and deconstructing these barriers substantive improvements to women’s lives will not be realised.

Furthermore that National Development Plan, *Vision for 2030* states unambiguously that the struggles against apartheid was first and foremost about the construction of a non-racial and non-sexist democratic society, in which all people have equal rights. This is embedded in the Constitution.

The Constitution stipulates that neither the state nor any person may discriminate against anyone else on the basis of race, gender and many others. Gender discrimination remains a major problem in several social and economic settings, including at the workplace. The relative comprehensive legislation on non-discrimination means that in many cases, the problem is ineffective implementation and enforcement of such policies and legislation.

Furthermore according to the National Development Plan, the gender mainstreaming approach is proving too difficult to put into operation, because it demands a high level of expertise and high level of political will. A united people and a more cohesive society are not only national objectives; they are also means to eradicate poverty and inequality.

## Programme Director

The final approval of and the endorsement the Defence Review by the National Assembly as the Republic of South Africa's policy on Defence gives us a great opportunity to realise our goal of gender mainstreaming in the DOD and in particular the SANDF.

**The** re-alignment of the role of the SANDF within a democratic framework has ensured that both women and men participate fully in the provision of security.

The Defence Review 2014 asserts that the SANDF will be an equitable, broadly representative and gender aligned national asset.

As you may recall, during my Budget Vote Speech in May 2015, I directed that Gender Issues be incorporated in all Military Development Courses, as this would be in compliance with the UN Peace Keeping Operation Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security.

Gender training has been promoted as a key strategy in efforts to mainstream gender perspective in National Development Plans, this therefore implies that as we finalise the DOD's plans to implement the Defence Review, we should also ensure that the Defence mandate is pursued through gender lenses.

Therefore, female soldiers' participation in military exercises, the SADC Standby Force Brigade, UN and AU missions must be underscored and promoted.

The importance of the Defence Review as a policy document for both the SANDF and government cannot be overemphasized. So is the National Development Plan as we move forward with our plans.

## Programme Director

Leadership lies at the centre of organisational excellence. The importance of exemplary military leadership cannot be over stated as any failure of the Defence Force in the execution of its mandate has dire consequences for the state. It is therefore, for this reason that the Defence Force cannot compromise of the education, training and development of its leaders including women in uniform in particular.

Military leadership is rooted in the burden of command and there can be no compromise in the development of confident women and men who will be placed in the positions of authority. The question that begs to be answered in our case is that are women given the opportunity at this level to take up their rightful positions.

The reason to ensure transformation is indeed about the success of the mandate of this organisation and government in general. We need women to lead to ensure the very success of our mandate, of protecting

the Republic of South Africa's territorial integrity and sovereignty and further contributing to peace and stability at home and abroad. There should be no contradiction in the relationship between these two tasks.

**Although** gender inequalities continue to exist, the contextual backdrop within which they exist is completely different. Within the military milieu, the re-definition of the mandate of the UN peacekeeping operations now covers a vast variety of responsibilities. As a result, the concept of national security includes promoting human security.

The general consensus is that, to achieve long term peace and stability both women and men need to be involved in the peace processes, peace negotiations and in the reconciliation processes.

Strangely enough, this is still not the case! Women, who make up more than half of the World's population, are often excluded from these processes; despite the fact that, they are often the ones hardest hit by the consequences of war and conflict.



It is with the great pride though, that to date, the SANDF has the largest contingency of women in our deployments in the country and the continent and this has been acknowledged by the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Office. With this we have set an example that women are as good as men in the military field. Women in the DOD have taken on multifaceted responsibilities in peace support operations, in the hardest environments on the African continent.

Today the DOD is proud of the contribution that women make towards the carrying out of the Constitutional mandate and sustenance of democracy in the country. This is evident in various internal operations that seek to support the people of our country.

The DOD women serve at the front line of safeguarding the SA borders, they support other government departments in times of need, and they are there for communities that are hit by natural disasters and over the years have become part of decision making bodies in the DOD.

These are some of a number of examples that define the life of a female member of the DOD, today. There is however still room for further improvements.

It remains true that the burden that women carry is seldom recognised. Their silent fortitude as they toil under the weight of manmade hardships often passes unnoticed. I must in this case advocate for a balanced distribution of tasks and responsibilities within the defence force.

The protection and defence of our country's sovereignty is no longer a male only preserve. Women are now actively involved in the provision of peace and security. Every passing day brings confirmation that women in defence occupy a very special place in the South African society because they have chosen to lay their lives for the protection of the sovereignty of the republic. This is not an easy decision to make in one's life.

My own experience has taught me that there is no limit to what a woman can do when given an opportunity and access to resources.

**There** is growing realization with respect to the fact that, the limitations of women's access to resources and decisions making, also limits their ability to develop and exercise their full capabilities for their own benefit and that of society. The message has become clear that development cannot take place if it excludes half of the human race.

I therefore urge all the women in the DOD to lead the way towards their own emancipation by working to make their mark in various capacities in the department.

I would like to repeat what I said in 2013 in the same conference in this very room because I believe it relevant today as it was relevant that year. As we celebrate our women, we celebrate the fact that overall we have political and policy changes that will continuously pave the way for women in the military to reach their highest points.

These policy and political changes must ensure that any change in this sector must recognise the role and

contribution women can make in the organisation and access all resources and support the organisation should give. As I stated in my Budget Vote Speech in May this year, women in the SANDF must raise their hands and avail themselves for all the opportunities that the defence force affords them. They, like all have the right to take up any position worthy of themselves.

It is important to direct our message to all our women that is crystal clear which states that we need them and that they are welcome in the SANDF and will be of great value to the organisation and the country.

I once again want to repeat that we have reached a stage where we are outgrowing the infancy stage as the South African National Defence Force (SANDF) now that we are in the second decade since the birth of a defence force in a democratic state. We therefore cannot be found wanting and standing in one place because history will judge us harshly.

**Indeed**, a significant part of our history has been about women of courage, who fought against injustices and challenged social barriers for acceptance and

recognition as equals and leaders in a patriarchal society. After all, gender is nothing more than a social construct. We should regard, as our legacy to change the social relations in which we live. Women's participation in all spheres of life is not a zero sum game which equals to victory for us and loss for men - but as an opportunity to unleash everyone's potential to the maximum.

Going forward, our challenge is to chip away, some of the patriarchal attitudes so that women can take their rightful place in defence of our democracy, just as they are, in the governing of our country. After all, the litmus test of democracy and real transformation is the devolution of power relations between women and men in all spheres of society.

Numbers are but only a small part of the arsenal we use in the multi-pronged strategy to ensure women's maximum participation.

Women cannot fight this battle alone but need the support of their male colleagues, husbands, uncles, fathers and brothers.

Last but not least, the appeal on all women in senior positions is to regard it as their responsibility to uplift others as they rise!

Thank you so much for your attention!!