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Date: 14 Aug 2009

Title: **Address by President JG Zuma at the Progressive Women's Movement dinner Sandton Convention Centre**

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Progressive Women's Movement of South Africa Convener, Ms Baleka Mbete,  
Co convener PWMSA, Minister Noluthando Mayende-Sibiya,  
Chairperson of the IEC, Dr Brigalia Bam  
The Public Protector, Advocate Mushwana  
United Nations Resident Coordinator- Dr Anyangwe,  
Provincial Conveners Present,  
1956 Veterans,  
Ministers, Deputy Ministers, Premiers, MECs

Good evening to you all.

It is an honour to address you tonight as we gather here to celebrate the role of women in our country and the world.

I am proud to be surrounded by so many women achievers, women who have helped spearhead the transformation of our society and further the role of women's rights.

Women have played a prominent role in the struggle for equal rights for all. Certainly the history of our country is littered with examples that illustrate women's resilience and struggle.

In 1912 Indian women led the first mass passive resistance campaign, encouraging Black and Indian miners in Newcastle to strike against starvation wages.

In 1913 Black and Coloured women in the Free State protested against having to carry passes, unlike their White counterparts.

In 1918 Charlotte Maxeke started the Bantu Women's League, the first formal women's organization, to fight against pass laws. In the 1930s and 1940s women participated in many demonstrations and passive resistance campaigns.

By 1943 membership of the ANC was open to women and by 1948 the ANC Women's League was started with Ida Mtwana as the first president.

Women of all races and classes joined the Defiance Campaign en masse in the 1950s united by their common struggles not only as women, but as mothers, daughters, workers and sisters of the revolution.

Their struggles culminated in the march of 9 August 1956.

Led by Sophie de Bruyn, Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi and Rahima Moosa 20 000 women converged on the Union Buildings, defying the convention that their role was merely that of homemaker.

The actions of those women continue to inspire and guide us today.

Fifteen years since the advent of democracy, government has made significant strides to ensure the emancipation of women as stated in our Freedom Charter and as demanded by the women of 1956.

The establishment of a democratic South Africa gave birth to a new era which advocates for equal participation of women in political and social issues.

This is in line with the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development, which calls on SADC Member States to embark upon national campaigns on the 50/50 representation of women.

Globally this call is for the 50/50 quota in all political and decision making structures and also at the implementation level.

It is not merely about numbers of women but it is a platform from which women can influence meaningful change,

and make a difference to the lives of all.

The AU Gender Policy which was adopted by AU Ministers of Gender in 2008 December in the Kingdom of Lesotho, emphasizes the creation of an enabling and stable environment for women and gender-sensitive budgets.

It has been consistently demonstrated globally that the under-representation of women in politics and decision making positions, has an adverse effect on national development as a whole. We should be seeing progressive increases as opposed to regression in terms of representation, particularly at the political level to influence meaningful change.

I am proud that we have five women premiers. Women occupy important positions in all Cabinet clusters. This includes women in portfolios such as correctional services; defence; home affairs; energy international relations and co-operation; mining; public enterprises; science and technology.

Women also occupy significant positions in the Economics cluster.

Our Parliament is ranked high internationally with regard to women's representation. Our country competes favourably in the list of top 20 most powerful business women across Africa and the world.

All these achievements tell us that women have proven their worth in many fields that contribute towards the growth and development of our country.

However, women empowerment and gender parity is not only about numbers. It is about ensuring that women make a meaningful contribution in society wherever they are deployed, and that the space is opened up for them to make a difference.

It is in this light I salute the Progressive Women's Movement. It stands out because it is a movement committed to fundamental social change in the lives of women.

This refers to overcoming the triple oppression that many women in our country still suffer from. The burden of patriarchy, the exploitation of women as workers and finally as black women needs to be eliminated. Until this happens in the lives of all women in our country we cannot consider our country free. The role of the Progressive Women's Movement is vital to achieving these goals.

The Movement is a powerful instrument that must be utilised strategically to advance the cause of gender equality, in commemoration of the women of 1956 and in acknowledgement of the challenges still facing women.

From 6 to 8 August 2006, women representing a broad spectrum of sectors and organizations launched the Progressive Women's Movement in Bloemfontein.

The August Bloemfontein gathering had been preceded many years earlier by the African National Congress's 1987 Women's Section National Conference and the 1989 Malibongwe Amsterdam Conference.

Both conferences emphasised the need for the formation of an umbrella National Women's Organisation against apartheid.

This new and timely movement was premised on the historic understanding that, firstly, radical social transformation would require people-driven leadership which draws inspiration from the grassroots.

Secondly it was driven by that social and economic transformation would not be possible without the real participation of women.

This gathering and its resolutions was a result of the recognition that without a women's movement, women's rights could not be consolidated and strengthened.

The best tribute we can pay to Women of 1956 is to defend the gains made and change the lives of those who are to yet taste this freedom in real terms.

The majority of these women are black, poor, rural and working class women existing on the periphery of society.

It is also significant that in its inaugural August 2006 gathering the PWM advocated for the "encouragement and promotion of the role of women in all spheres of the society and the protection of fundamental human rights and women's rights in particular".

In pursuing these objectives the conference directed decision making structures to equalise access to opportunities, whilst focusing on economic and social transformation as well as governance, monitoring and international relations.

In pursuit of these and other objectives the 52nd Congress of the African National Congress endorsed the principle of 50/50 representation in all decision making structures.

It resolved that this should be done whilst also further exploring the form and content of whatever institutional mechanisms to be put in place in pursuit of women's emancipation.

In pursuit of this strategic objective, we appointed 14 women into Ministerial positions, 11 as Deputy Minister and 5 women Premiers. This cannot be enough, but we are getting somewhere.

We took this process a step further by establishing a Ministry for Women, Children and People with Disabilities.

This Ministry has to ensure the participation of these three sectors in all aspects of life. However, gender issues are cross-cutting in nature and cannot be addressed solely by government alone or one Ministry.

The new Ministry will monitor other government departments to ensure the mainstreaming of gender, children's rights, and disability considerations into all programmes of government and other sectors.

This will help government to respond to issues of these targeted groups in an integrated and coherent manner.

This gala dinner aims to bring to the fore the issue of "Training for Women's Entrepreneurships" that will seek to unleash the untapped women entrepreneurial skills amongst those women who are already engaged in some form of business.

The collaborative work between the Women's Ministry and Progressive Women's Movement needs to be encouraged as it emphasises the partnership that is necessary between government and civil society for the empowerment of women.

As Government, we would want to see a material improvement in the quality of life of women, be they domestic workers, farm workers or corporate executives.

We must work together to ensure that women live their lives free of fear, degradation and brutalization.

We must work together to ensure that women do not have to suffer from the effects of poverty, disease and effects of harmful traditional practices.

We are working to ensure that Africa becomes free from being a country of origin, transit and destination points in the trafficking of persons, especially in women and girls.

We do not want mothers and fathers to have to bury their own children, cut down in their prime by HIV and AIDs and through manifestations of sexual violence and crime. This is a vision shared by many.

It is a vision that will be expressed through many projects and activities throughout the country for a better life for women who are hoping that these dreams will be realized in their own lifetime, and one that their daughters will benefit from for generations to come.

It is a vision that requires commitment, dedication, and the requisite human, material and financial resources.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Women's Charter, adopted at the founding congress of the Federation of South African Women in 1954 stated:

"We women do not form a society separate from the men. There is only one society, and it is made up of both women and men. As women we share the problems and anxieties of our men, and join hands with them to

remove social evils and obstacles to progress.

"The level of civilisation which any society has reached can be measured by the degree of freedom that its members enjoy. The status of women is a test of civilisation."

In the 21st century, let us inculcate among all our children from a young age that women are the bedrock upon which all societies rest.

Together we can build a more inclusive country based on the principles of non-racialism and equality.

I thank you.

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