



THE PERMANENT MISSION OF
SOUTH AFRICA
TO THE UNITED NATIONS

333 East 38th Street
9th Floor
New York, NY 10016
Tel: (212) 213-5583
Fax: (212) 692-2498
E-mail: pmun@southafrica-newyork.net

**STATEMENT
BY**

**H.E. MS. LULU XINGWANA
MINISTER FOR WOMEN, CHILDREN AND PEOPLE
WITH DISABILITIES OF THE
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA**

**ON THE OCCASION OF THE 56TH SESSION OF THE
COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN**

**UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY
NEW YORK
28 FEBRUARY 2012**

Please check against delivery

Madam Chair,
President of the Economic and Social Council,
Madam Executive Director,
Excellencies,
Distinguished Delegates,

We congratulate you and members of the Bureau on your election. Be assured of my delegation's support.

At the outset, my delegation aligns itself with the statements delivered on behalf of the Group of 77 and China, the Africa Group and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Group.

We welcome the Secretary-General's report on the priority theme, "the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty and hunger eradication, development and current challenges".

We are particularly pleased that the report recognises South Africa's best practices, including promoting women's access to processing facilities, distribution and transport networks, which proved to be successful in assisting women tomato farmers in South Africa to produce and sell tomato products to retail supermarkets.

As we look to broaden the engagement of young women, men, boys and girls to advance gender equity, we again welcome the recognition by the Secretary-General of South Africa's progress in actively engaging men and boys. In this regard, we are doubling our efforts to ensure an increase in the number of men's organisation's involved in the advancement of gender equality.

At the international level, we recognise the important role played by Member States and United Nations bodies such as the Commission on the Status of Women in positively advancing progress on the achievement of international instruments such as the Beijing Declaration of Action and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

In the context of South-South Cooperation, South Africa has established an important platform of engagement for women, including rural women with a number of African countries, as well as India, China and Brazil.

We welcome the theme of the 56th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women entitled "the empowerment of rural women and their role in poverty eradication, development and current

challenges" which is in line with the Declaration by African Heads of State and Government of 2010-2020 as the African Women's Decade.

In South Africa we prioritised the empowerment of rural women. This has been done through the mainstreaming of gender as part of a Comprehensive Rural Development Programme (CRDP) that will enable government to measure the impact of the CRDP and to develop appropriate response strategies. The elements of the CRDP include providing access to funding, training, transfer of technology, building of partnerships with private sector and relevant civil society stakeholders, as well as monitoring inequality in the redistribution of land.

Madam Chair,

Women in South Africa have always been at the forefront of the liberation struggle and are still at the forefront of the continuing struggle for economic emancipation.

South Africa has done well in the area of political decision-making for women. We presently have 44% women representation in Parliament and 43% women at the level of Cabinet Ministers. We continue to strive for parity and this year my Department will table the Gender Equity Bill in Parliament.

Enhancing rural women's leadership and meaningful participation at parliamentary and local government levels, also with the participation of traditional, religious and civil society organisations will ensure that more attention is focused on meeting the needs of women and girls.

There is a clear indication that gender equality and women's empowerment contribute to the achievement of MDG 1 on poverty and hunger reduction and to economic growth directly through women's increased labour force participation, productivity and earnings, as well as indirectly through improved social, economic and educational benefits to children. Efforts in this regard, will assist South Africa in achieving specific MDG targets by 2015, as indicated in our 2010 Country Report indicated.

In support of these objectives, the South African Government has indicated its commitment, including budget allocations to fund a massive programme of infrastructure development as announced by President Zuma in his State of the Nation Address that will be rolled-out over a number of years. The purpose of this infrastructure development is to also make provision for rural women to benefit from this huge public investment by government.

Madam Chair,

Government recognises education for women and girls as essential if we are to break the cycle of poverty and access to women's health, especially decreasing maternal and child mortality and the negative impact of HIV and AIDS on women and girls.

We are happy to report that in the past year, as a result of an intensive advocacy programme, we have successfully reduced Mother to Child Transmissions (MTCT) of HIV by 50%. We will continue to build strong partnerships with civil society in working towards the objective of zero Mother to Child Transmissions.

Government also recognises that it is in the empowerment of women that we can begin to make inroads to addressing the growing scourge of gender-based violence and in this regard, has committed our Deputy President to head the National Council Against Gender Based Violence to be established this year.

Madam Chair,

Women are disproportionately impacted by the negative effects of climate change due to their social roles, discrimination and poverty. As women are powerful agents of change, it is imperative for Member States to ensure active participation and consultation of women in environmental planning, finance, budgeting and policy-making processes. In this regard, women possess the indigenous knowledge needed to increase food security, prevent environmental degradation and maintain agricultural biodiversity. Women, in particular those in the rural areas must be involved in all aspects of adaptation and mitigation efforts in their communities. Climate change policies and financing mechanisms must respond to the needs of women and men equitably.

The financing for gender equality and the economic empowerment of women remains a critical area of work. Just this week, we launched the inaugural Women's Budget Initiative, a partnership between the private sector, civil society and government, which seeks to ensure that the national budget becomes an instrument in support of gender equality and women empowerment. We are convinced that a gender-responsive budget can be a tool to promote women's socio-economic rights.

South Africa has a progressive legislative environment. However, many rural women, children, and people with disabilities are still marginalised, with limited access to opportunities, resources,

environments and technical aids that would afford them independence, dignity and self-sufficiency.

Underlying the polarising patriarchal and social constructs in our society are conservative gender and disability blind economic frameworks that constrain the development and implementation of policies, aimed at empowering women and vulnerable groups. We are fully aware that budgets have been instrumental in perpetuating gender biases globally, however, we also know that they can be utilised as a tool to transform and redress existing gender and disability inequalities.

I thank you.