

## **Keynote address by Mr Sw Lubisi, the speaker of the Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature, South Africa: International Women`s Day and Commonwealth Day 2010**

8 March 2010

Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature  
Programme Directors,  
Deputy Speaker,  
Members of the Executive Council present,  
Members of the Provincial Legislature,  
Our guests from Mozambique, Nigeria and Swaziland  
Business guests,  
Members of the public from across the length and breadth of the province,  
Other Guests from various organs of state,  
Secretary to the Legislature and Members of the Legislature Management Team,  
Our revered women of our province,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Good morning.

I am most honoured today to have this opportunity to extend warm greetings on this day, the 8th of March 2010, where we celebrate both the International Women`s Day, 2010 and the International Commonwealth Day, 2010 under the themes: Equal Rights, Equal Opportunities, Progress for all and Science, Technology and Society.

Indeed, it is appropriate that during our deliberations today, we take cognisance of the fact that this year 2010, both events are taking place on the same day. The International Women`s Day is an international calendar day on the 08th of March annually whilst every year, on the second Monday in March, people all around the Commonwealth countries get together to celebrate the special partnership of nations, peoples and ideals which make the Commonwealth unique and thus we called it the Commonwealth Day.

As we engage in our activities today, all of us should salute the women of the world, who are clearly a powerful and reliable engine for change.

Clearly, an important element of the crucial role you play and must continue to play is to ensure that women occupy their rightful place in the historic process of the rebuilding of the nation.

This will be incomplete without us having to take stock of the successes and the challenges that confronted us over the past fifteen years of our democracy and begin to build a solid foundation for our future.

We need to focus attention and accelerate the process to achieve, to realize, the goals of the MDGs by the target year, 2015. We have only six years left before 2015.

The MDGs represent a global partnership that has grown from the commitments and targets established at the world summits of the 1990s.

Responding to the world`s main development challenges and to the calls of civil society, the MDGs promote poverty reduction, education, maternal health, gender equality, and aim at combating child mortality, AIDS and other diseases. All of the above have a direct bearing to women empowerment and gender equity and as we embark on the International Woman`s Day events, let us prioritise all these challenges.

The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) in its Gender Equity Report says that:

"Any form of gender discrimination is a denial of human rights, an obstacle to human development. Gender mainstreaming means being deliberate in giving visibility and support to women's contributions and addressing the differential impact of strategies, policies, programmes and projects on women compared with men. It requires a focus on actual results in terms of gender equality in the practice areas at all levels."

The Report continues that:

"Gender mainstreaming means being deliberate in giving visibility and support to women's contributions rather than making the assumption that women will benefit equally from gender-neutral development interventions. Policies and programmes that ignore differential impact on gender groups are often gender-blind; (and) potentially harmful for human development. Gender mainstreaming requires a focus on results to improve the well-being of poor women."

South Africa and Africa are faced with enormous challenges of poverty and underdevelopment. All of us agree that the reasons for this are the legacy born of centuries of colonialism and imperialism which expressed itself in political oppression, economic exploitation, social and cultural subjugation, as well as mistakes we ourselves have made during the years of our independence. All these have contributed to underdevelopment in one form or the other.

Therefore, decisions on the emancipation and empowerment of women are important, it is in the actual implementation of clear programmes with timelines that we will make a difference in advancing gender equality

Chairpersons,

Gender inequalities make women vulnerable to income, poverty and leads to denial of opportunities and the essentials that provide a better life. If these issues are not addressed, together they perpetuate poverty from one generation to the next.

Importantly, strategies to eradicate poverty must also address factors such as respect, dignity and freedom as well as participation in all levels of decisionmaking. Globally, but especially in Africa, women have inadequate access to the resources they need to become economically productive and independent.

Yet, as we know, women are very industrious and dynamic in the face of serious odds.

We see this in instances where women defy serious challenges even in difficult circumstances, such as in the informal economy, working as hawkers, in part time jobs, in agriculture and in domestic service, determined to provide for their families.

International Woman's Day (IWD) is now an official holiday in China, Armenia, Russia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Macedonia, Moldova, Mongolia, Tajikistan, Ukraine, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

The tradition sees men honouring their mothers, wives, girlfriends, colleagues, etc with flowers and small gifts. In some countries IWD has the equivalent status of Mother's Day where children give small presents to their mothers and grandmothers.

The new millennium has witnessed a significant change and attitudinal shift in both women's and society's thoughts about women's equality and emancipation.

Many from a younger generation feel that all the battles have been won for women while many feminists from the 1970's know only too well the longevity and ingrained complexity of patriarchy.

With more women in the boardroom, greater equality in legislative rights, and an increased critical mass of women's visibility as impressive role models in every aspect of life, one could think that women have gained true equality.

The unfortunate fact is that women are still not paid equally to that of their male counterparts, women still are not present in equal numbers in business or politics, and globally women's education, health and the violence against them is worse than that of men.

However, great improvements have been made. We do have female astronauts and prime ministers. More and more girl children are entering university, women can work and have a family, women have real choices. And so the tone and nature of IWD has, for the past few years, moved from being a reminder about the negatives to a celebration of the positives.

Annually on 8 March, thousands of events are held throughout the world to inspire women and celebrate achievements. As we partake to the International Woman's Day events joining the entire world, let us remember that Equal rights, Equal Opportunities, Progress for all as our theme for 2010. Chairpersons,

The Commonwealth is a voluntary association of 54 countries that support each other and work together towards shared goals in democracy and development. The world's largest and smallest, richest and poorest countries make up the Commonwealth and are home to two billion citizens of all faiths and ethnicities - over half of whom are 25 or under.

Member countries span six continents and oceans from Africa (19) to Asia (8), the Americas (2), the Caribbean (12), Europe (3) and the South Pacific (10).

The Commonwealth, with roots as far back as the 1870s, believes that the best democracies are achieved through partnerships - of governments, business, and civil society. This unique association was reconstituted in 1949 when Commonwealth Prime Ministers met and adopted what has become known as the 'London Declaration' where it was agreed all member countries would be "freely and equally associated."

Commonwealth countries work together in a spirit of cooperation, partnership and understanding. This openness and flexibility are integral to the Commonwealth's effectiveness. Emphasis on equality has helped it play leading roles in decolonisation, combating racism and advancing sustainable development in poor countries.

This year we are focusing our energy on Science, Technology and Society because science underpins economic and social progress, and that access to technology is fundamental to equitability and the implementation of democracy.

Science can help to address poor governance through improved accountability and monitoring. It is fundamental to appropriate policy-making in use of natural resources such as forests, fisheries, or in planning waste management, water supply, sanitation and environmental health. Science and technology contribute to wealth creation and poverty eradication, and good health provision.

As we are gathered here today, we are confronted by many challenges such as global warming and shortage of energy generation in our country. All of the above can be addressed if we place Science, Technology and Society at the top of our agenda and ensure that adequate financial resources and competent personnel are clustered to ensure that concrete programmes and plans are developed and implemented to realise the dream of a better world with a bright future.

Science and Technology have proven to be a competent driving force for quality energy generation and efficient use. Ours is to partner with all stakeholders to ensure that a proudly local product is produced to address the challenges we are confronting.

Let`s maximise the use knowledge and information to advance the use of science and technology for societal development.

Chairperson and Delegates, we remain humbled by your resolve and your dedication to the cause of the emancipation of women, as well as the work you do radically to change the life circumstances of all our people.

We further took note of the contributions made by the Commonwealth Member Countries in strengthening our democratic systems of governance across the world.

Let`s work together to do more.

Thank you.