

# **Welcoming address delivered by Honourable S.W. Lubisi, Speaker of Mpumalanga Provincial Legislature to the Provincial Women's Parliament**

5 August 2010, Legislature Chamber

Programme Directors

Our Honourable Guest: Minister Noluthando Mayende-Sibiya ; Minister of Women, Youth, Children and People with Disabilities

Hon Deputy Speaker, Ms VS Siwela

Hon Chair of Chairs, Ms KC Mashego-Dlamini

Honourable Members

Executives of various Women Organisations

Organised Women Structures in Mpumalanga

Members of the Media

Advocates for Women Affairs

Distinguished delegates to this Womens Parliament

Ladies and Gentlemen

I wish to take this opportunity to welcome all of you that have made an effort and time to attend this important Womens Parliament today. I deem it a singular honour and privilege to deliver this opening address.

I wish to express my profound gratitude to the various Gender organisations in the country and Mpumalanga in particular and all champions of Gender equality that have contributed in no mean measure to make this year's Women Parliament a reality.

The theme for the 2010 Womens Parliament "Working together with women to intensify oversight to foster service delivery".

Under this theme, the following topics will be considered; Capacity development for Women, Women and rural development, and, Women and the global economic meltdown.

In many parts of our communities over 60% of women are vulnerable, illiterate and poor. They have a limited role in politics and decision making of matters affecting their lives. They are therefore unable to assist their communities to capture the commanding heights of their economies and thus impede rural development.

Programme Directors, the economic situation has not yet reached the desired level of recovery since the economic meltdown in the late 2007 early 2008. I humbly call on all Community Based Organisations, Women NGOs to view this economic situation seriously as it has the potential to degenerate into unexpected and undesirable oppressive behaviour in rural communities.

It is women and children who suffer the most from the ravages of poverty and underdevelopment and this has a dire strain in the economy. It is common that women who count in the scheme of things as breadwinners and domestic managers are not counted.

A high percentage of them fall into this vulnerable group and are below poverty line as compared with men. We have produced more and more children than our economies can comfortably accommodate.

Uneven social and economic development policies have induced rapid rural urban migration. That is why we have streetism (street children), child labour and instability in marriages, an increase in divorce rate and domestic violence hence our government intervention of rural development.

We have gender inequality in all spheres of activities which manifest itself in inequality, discrimination and utter deprivation and marginalisation.

I wish to point out that the concepts of democracy and good governance and gender mainstreaming mean nothing to poor men and women. The evidence we have, is, that gender equity policies and investing in women, bring more development dividends and prosperity.

Lastly, during the week of the 27 – 31 July 2010, we hosted the 41st CPA Africa Region Conference in our province at Mbombela Stadium. Amongst the issues discussed were: teenage pregnancies, teenage mothers returning to school and abortion in Africa, sustainability of donor funding of HIV/AIDS programmes in Africa, and, Constitutional democracy in Africa.

Key resolutions were taken at the conference amongst others were; access to basic quality education by teenage pregnant girls and mothers; reducing the rate of morbidity and mortality in teenage girls due to unsafe abortions and childbirth, recommended that parliaments must push for 50% funding of HIV/AIDS funding from their governments, considering circumcision as a method of reducing the risk of contracting HIV/AIDS and many others.

I am raising this to indicate our willingness and commitment to deal with all challenges affecting women and children in the continent.

I wish you a robust, sincere, and vibrant debate on more recent national women`s issues like pregnancy in schools, establishment of women –led enterprises and establishment of Women Development Fund.

I thank you.