SPEECH BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER FOR AGRICULTURE AND LAND AFFAIRS, MS LULU XINGWANA (MP)

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN’S DAY (IWD) – A partnership between the Departments of Agriculture and Land Affairs with Women in Agriculture and Rural Development (WARD)

National Cultural History Museum
PRETORIA
31 MARCH 2008
The International Women’s Day (IWD) is a major day of global celebration for the economic, political and social achievements of women. It is marked every year on 8 March.

The first IWD was observed on 28 February 1909 in the United States following a declaration by the Socialist Party of America. The idea of having an International Women’s Day was first conceived amid protests over working conditions. One such protest took place in 1908 when 15,000 women marched through Manhattan demanding shorter working hours, better pay and voting rights.
Another protest of note took place much earlier, on 8 March 1857 in New York City. Garment workers were protesting against very poor working conditions and low wages. In 1910 the Socialist International meeting in Copenhagen established a Women’s Day, international in character, to honour the movement of women’s rights and to build support for achieving universal suffrage for women.

On 19 March 1911 the IWD was marked for the first time in Austria, Denmark, Germany and Switzerland where more than one million women attended rallies. In addition to the right to vote, the women demanded the right to work, to vocational training and the end of discrimination on the job front.

On 8 March 1917 women in Russia embarked on a strike and protested for “Bread and Peace”. Four days later the provisional government granted women the right to vote.

Through celebrating the IWD, women of all countries can look back at a tradition that represents almost ten decades of struggle for equality, justice, peace and development.

Quite correctly so, since the demise of the apartheid government in 1994, women have taken their place in democratic South Africa as well, by taking advantages of the opportunities brought about through democracy.
This factor was well articulated by Thabo Mbeki during his second term inauguration ceremony as President when he said:

“No government in South Africa could ever claim to represent the will of the people if it failed to address the central task of emancipation of women in all its elements, and that includes the government we are privileged to lead”.

Indeed there has been an increase in the intake of women in the formal employment sectors and leadership positions, particularly in the public service where gender representation has improved significantly.

The collective determination of government to recognise women as critical players in a developmental society has resulted in 40 percent of national government Ministers and Deputy Ministers.

Today women have access to land, agriculture, social wage, housing, education, health, free basic services and other broader issues to realise gender equity in all spheres of life.

Business Day of 28 March 2008 reports that the female jobless rate dropped to 26,7 % in September from 30,7 % in the same month the year before, showing women accounted for most of the net 433 000 rise in jobs.
As government we renew our pledge to women emancipation, empowerment equality and poverty eradication through programmes such as the Expanded Public Works Programme, the Accelerated and Shared Growth Initiative for South Africa (ASGISA), and the cluster-based programmes focusing on women.

Government will continue to work with its social partners to promote the economic empowerment of women in: access to finance; fast-tracking of skills development at all levels; and government procurement.

When talking about access to finance and skills development, it delights me to announce that since the launch of the AgriBEE framework in July 2004 my colleague in the Department of Trade and Industry in South Africa, Hon. Mandisa Mphahlwa has approved our application for the AgriBEE Sector Transformation Charter which was gazetted in terms of Section 12 of the Broad – Base Black Economic Empowerment Act (2003) on the 20 March 2008.

Broad-based Black Economic Empowerment (as defined in the act) means the economic empowerment of all black people including women, workers, youth, people with disabilities and people living in rural areas through diverse but integrated socio-economic strategies.

The objectives of AgriBEE are to facilitate Broad-Based Black Economics Empowerment in the Agricultural Sector by implementing
initiatives to include Black South Africans at all levels of agricultural activity and enterprises by *inter alia*:

- Increasing the extent to which black women, people living with disabilities and youth own and manage existing and new agricultural enterprises, increasing their access to economic activities, infrastructure and skills training; and

- Empowering rural and local communities to have access to agricultural economic activities, land, agricultural infrastructure, ownership and skills

The employment equity element as reflected in the Act is to increase the representation of Black Women and Black Designated Groups at senior management level, at professionally qualified, experienced specialists, mid-management level, at skilled technical and academically qualified, junior management supervisory, foremen and superintendent level, in entire the Agri-Industry. This will be achieved by increasing the absolute and relative number of Black People in these positions and by implementing mechanisms under the skills development element to ensure that secondary, tertiary and in-house training and development programmes are design to meet the targets set under the employment equity element.

Programme Director, I also want to announce that preparations under way to establish an AgriBEE Charter Council that will report to the Black Economic Empowerment Advisory Council, appointed in terms
of the Act and the Minister of Trade and Industry on progress made by the Sector in terms of the AgriBEE Charter.

One of the aims of this gathering today is to reflect on progress made by reviewing how far women have come in their struggle for equality and development. Allow me therefore Programme Director to mention but just a few of these success stories:

There is an exciting project in the Gauteng Province under the Proactive Land Acquisition Strategy (PLAS), whose owners are farming in poultry. This farm produces 27 000 eggs per day and supplies super markets like Spar, Checkers and hotels and also exports eggs to Mozambique. The last time I had contact with them the demand was so high that the project was looking for additional 40 women to come and work on the farm.

The Department of Agriculture is running an annual programme of the Female Farmer of the Year in each of the provinces, to promote active participation of women in commercial agriculture. In this programme we have seen small producers who are producing poultry, vegetables and other livelihood crops, we have seen women who are producing for the local markets, those who sell their produce in the local and national markets, such as horticulture and livestock products, others do exports. We do have women doing goats in the Northern Cape, UMmaDlamini doing sheep in Qunu in the Eastern Cape. In Limpopo women are exporting avocados to the EU, guava and archar to Japan. Women in the Eastern Cape, Mount
Ayliff are exporting flowers like proteas and also producing vegetables for local markets. We need more women to come into this sector to fight poverty, hunger and unemployment.

The past winners of this campaign amongst others include Ms Tendani Senoamadi of the Hillcrescent Estate, in Limpopo farming in bananas, litchi, avocado and guava. Another is Ms Linda Olga Nghatsane from the Abundant Life Skills project in Mpumalanga farming in poultry. Ms Thami Zimu from KwaZulu-Natal who farms in forestry and timber, and lastly Ms Jean Davidson of Gauteng who farms in roses.

In Restitution we have witnessed that more than 40% of land claimant households are female headed. We have handed a lot of big and viable projects and my emphasis has been the participation of rural women in all these projects were land has been handed over to the communities. These include amongst others:

- Sugar-cane, such as the TSB in Mpumalanga and Illovo Sugar-Milling and Tongaat Sugar in KwaZulu-Natal and North Pondoland sugar cane plant in Bizana
- Tea Estates of Sapekoe in Makgoba in Limpopo, and Majola, Magwa tea estates in Eastern Cape;
- Forestry claims with saw-milling, pulp, contracting in Limpopo, Mpumalanga, KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape;
- Livestock Farming, goats, sheep, dairy, abattoirs, leather & other products;
• Conservation & Game Farms in Hluhluwe, St Lucia Phinda, Maluleke, Dwesa-Cwebe;
• Citrus exports such as Zebediela in Limpopo where the claimants are exporting;

Programme Director, the policies, programmes and projects provided by the Ministry for Agriculture and Land Affairs create an enabling environment for rural women to access, use, own, control and manage land. However challenges like the patriarchal system that still exists in our society hinders the implementation of many of our progressive policies and programmes. This has been the case in the former homelands. The Ministry takes seriously the fact that women’s access, control, management and ownership to land brings about security against poverty, efficiency with regard to agricultural produce, equality and empowerment.

In conclusion the African National Congress, at its 52nd National Conference held in December 2007 in Polokwane, noted that:

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“Gender equality must be a critical ingredient and important outcome of all our programmes of rural development, land reform and agrarian change. Correcting the injustices of the past requires that women increasingly become the beneficiaries and decision-makers in respect of strategies to overcome poverty in rural areas”.
Close quotes

Let us all remember that the International theme for this year’s IWD is “Investing in Women and Girls”, and that the South African theme for the same celebration is titled “WAR AGAINST POVERTY: Building a partnership for Investing in Women and Girls to eradicate Poverty”. Bearing this in mind, the many challenges facing women in present-day South Africa can be overcome if they are approached with the same commitment as displayed by women during the struggle for freedom.

I THANK YOU