

**Celebration of the Freedom Charter**  
**(hosted by Women in Action for Development)**  
**Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**12 May 2005**

***“WOMEN AS EQUAL PARTNERS IN BUILDING ONE NATION”***

Programme Director  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

Fifty years ago the people of South Africa, women and men, stood united together as equal partners and committed themselves and our country to the values that today guide our vision for a democratic, non-racial, non-sexist society with a broad objective to afford a better life to all who belong to South Africa.

The celebration of the Freedom Charter on 26 June this year is most fitting not only because it has to date 50 Years of existence but because it has provided a framework for making South Africa a better country among the nations of the world. It has provided the framework to overcome the challenges of discrimination, racism and gender, injustice, stolen birthrights of land, liberty and equality. Our success of the first decade of democracy was as a result of the values enshrined in our Freedom Charter, hence our Constitution and the progressive and enabling legal framework.

The commitment we made in the Freedom Charter was not only to fight against these injustices but we also pledged to fight for social justice, dignity, work and security, education, houses, security and comfort, and peace and friendship within our country and beyond our borders.

We have achieved a lot in the last ten years and this, hand in hand with the private sector through a partnership. As government we appreciate the positive cooperation we get from business and other private sector partners – we say thank you for lending a hand in the fight against poverty and other challenges for a better life.

However, we want to say that we still have a long way to go to reach the goal of a better life for all South Africans – this is clear to all of us. But with the legislative framework and the programmes of government that we have in place, we remain confident that the second decade of our democracy will build on and consolidate what we have achieved.

We have managed to provide the land to the people and communities through government's Land Reform and Restitution programmes. We have a Preferential Procurement policy that is aimed at facilitating the access to economic opportunities by women.

As we all know, the second decade of democracy is characterised by strengthening the first economy and building the second economy. As government, we have gone further to provide a legal framework and a mechanism for all to operationalise this and other government programmes in the form of BBBEE Charter.

We have, through the Department of Foreign Affairs created opportunities for South Africans, at all levels – government, business and civil society – to engage with the world for the livelihood of all our people. Recently I jointly launched a water project with the Japan government, in one of the poorest communities in the Eastern Cape. I congratulated Japan for understanding our situation – that we are two worlds in one country, a developed and a developing world. This is often not understood as the world rate us as the middle income economy and yet we have the majority of our people still constituting what we in South Africa have come to understand as the second economy.

The majority in the second economy are women who are also in the remote rural areas and are still trapped in high levels of poverty.

In my portfolio, which is Water Affairs and Forestry – women are the most affected by lack of access to water and sanitation and this has further implications like women not having quality time to spend with their families; and girl children are being deprived of education opportunities.

The analysis of our sector tells us that in fact providing access to water and forestry equals to opening up opportunities especially for women to participate as equal partners in the economy. Women should be encouraged to lead local development – we believe that women leadership in development is the answer to sustainable communities.

We need to encourage entrepreneurship of women and encourage them to participate in local economic development. But most importantly we need to encourage wealth creation and business ownership – this we need much as we need to create opportunities for employment. It is also important that these women become assertive in accessing these opportunities.

Our biggest challenge is to ensure that the women who benefit are those who are in the rural areas. I want to challenge business to expand its wings and ensure that such women are the main beneficiaries.

Working together with government, we would have to ensure that these women are empowered with skills and information that would enable them to participate meaningfully in economic activities of our country. We cannot claim to have succeeded in reducing poverty if those women are not participating in the economy.

I want to further challenge business to enter into partnership with government in the context of the Integrated Sustainable Rural Development (ISRDP) and Urban Renewal Programme (URP - to ensure that economic opportunities are made accessible to women.

Business is called upon to contribute in educational programmes of women especially in the rural areas to impart life skills such as entering the banking arena for more effective empowerment.

The South African Women Entrepreneurship (SAWEN) under the leadership of Deputy Minister of Trade and Industry (Mrs Lindiwe Hendricks is a very good initiative for women in business and entrepreneurship that should be assisted by business and private sector and this would be a significant contribution to the economic empowerment of women and the development of the second economy.

This would be a response and the realisation of a future in which "the national wealth of our country, the heritage of South Africans, shall be restored to the people", the value that "people shall share in the wealth of the nation" and that 'There shall be work and security' for all.

This would be a positive response to advancing the poverty eradication agenda of the United Nations, which has declared this year (2005) as the Year of Micro-credit.

As we move forward, we need to ask ourselves how far are we in creating a society in which women are equal partners in the workplace at all levels – as shop stewards, in the corridors of management or in the boardroom a place where they work together as colleagues building a developmental economy that can overcome poverty and ensure we all share in the wealth of our country.

How far are we in creating a society, in which farm workers, domestic workers and other sectors of society in which workers are vulnerable especially women, enjoy the benefits of the legislation our government as enacted to improve their conditions.

How far are we in creating a society in which women in our governance structures, social and justice institutions work in partnership to create a nation that embraces the aspirations enshrined in the Freedom Charter, and the Women's Charter.

All these we need to do in order to consolidate and deepen our democracy, the stability we have created in the past decade and the hope that we as government and the private sector have instilled in our people.

We are enjoying a season of hope and it is important that we make the best out of the opportunities that are available, most importantly the empowerment of women for the betterment of society. As the saying goes "you empower a women, you empower the nation".

THANK YOU.