



**Address by the Honourable Deputy Minister of Transport,
Ms Sindisiwe Chikunga (MP) on the Occasion of a Gala
Dinner at the Inaugural Global Aviation Gender Summit,
Cape Town ICC, on 10 August 2018**

Programme Director

Secretary General of ICAO: Dr Fang Liu

The Executive Mayor of Ekurhuleni, Gauteng: Masina

Members of the Sisulu

All the Protocols Observed

Introduction

It is again a great pleasure to be back here with you to share these moments with you in this city that has such a rich and colourful history.

It is a city that in the 1600s saw the coming together of peoples, cultures and histories in a context of exchanges that presented the most enormous opportunity for human kind.

It is a city that stood at the cold face of people to people exchanges that could have turned out as a wealth and a heritage for all.

The imposing figure of the table shaped mountain served as a beacon of curiosity and discovery for the docking European sailors whose sole aim was to find refreshment and repose from the punishing and difficult journey to Asia.

This imposing mountain stood as landmark to what would be called the Cape of Good Hope.

Mama Albertina Sisulu and Women's Day

Today, on this our Women's Day, we celebrate and commemorate the life and times of an extraordinary and unfaltering leader of South Africa's struggle for liberation and progress.

More importantly we celebrate the life and times of a great leader of women's struggles, Ma Albertina Sisulu. It is for that reason that the organisers of this dinner dedicate it to Ma Sisulu.

On that note, Programme Director, please allow me to acknowledge members of the Sisulu family in our midst.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is proper that as we pay tribute to Ma Sisulu, we must as well pay tribute to the broad liberation movement in our country and the rest of Africa, including the rest of the world as it engaged in the struggle to defeat the last and best resourced outpost of the global colonial system of Apartheid South Africa.

This Global Summit encounter that enjoins us to shake loose the foundations of gender inequality is today strengthened by the memory that we are not the first that shall put brick and mortar to this future we wish to build for generations to come.

Today many of South Africa and South Africa's women rejoice at the fortune of being associated with the name of Albertina Sisulu as a country and as a people.

Mrs Albertina Nonsikelelo Sisulu was born to Bonilizwe and Monica Thethiwe on the 21 October 1918.

This year in October Ma Sisulu would have been turning a 100 years old if she was still alive.

Mama Sisulu was married to a committed revolutionary, Walter Sisulu whose name I read with tears of joy and longing for he was my father and the multitudes of South Africans.

Due to their political activism Mama Sisulu and her husband were jailed several times and she was regularly harassed by the Security Police.

Mama Sisulu became the first woman to be arrested under the General Laws Amendment Act.

Programme Director,

The Act gave the police the power to randomly hold suspects in detention for 90 days without charging them, and in Ma Albertina Sisulu's case she was placed in solitary confinement incommunicado, that is, without any contact with any person including family for almost two months while the Security Branch looked for her husband.

The aim of solitary confinement was to break all those who fought for a democratic SA and against Apartheid.

Mama Sisulu was a mother and a wife

She was a mother whose role as mother she never could enjoy because many a time this was taken away from her by detentions and interrupted by violent harassment.

For most of her married life she could never enjoy the comforts of her husband, who together with Nelson Mandela and many others were jailed or banned for almost three decades.

Baba Walter Sisulu had been incarcerated as a result of a treason trial.

She knew she could never be fully a mother to her children under conditions of repressive colonial domination, nor could she allow her children to grow up under conditions of apartheid colonialism.

Her life was defined by her struggle for liberation and the emancipation of women.

1956 Women's March

When in 1956, on this day the 9th of August, 20 000 women marched against the pass laws that curtailed the movement of black people, she led from the front.

The pass laws meant that as a Black person to come into the city you would have had to produce a pass or permit in the absence of which you would be immediately arrested.

For that she had paid, for many including her were arrested and tortured in prison and detained under the most inhumane conditions.

When her children were barely old enough they had left the country and joined the multitudes that left the country for exile and continued the struggle from foreign lands.

Ladies and gentlemen, South Africa's attainment of democracy was not a free lunch. Its price tag most families are still paying for.

Between 1961 and 1985 Ma Sisulu had years of ransom detainment, house arrests, solitary confinement and longer banning than any other person in South Africa had experienced.

The regime was brutal irrespective of gender or age.

Deprived of family

She had been left longing not only for her husband that had been jailed under draconian and racist laws, but longed also for her children.

So when we speak of ma Sisulu we speak of the many mothers that never could enjoy the comforts and joys of family, for apartheid threw to the dogs any concept of family stability among black people.

Migrant labour system

When we speak of Ma Sisulu we speak also of all the women whose husbands were not only jailed at times, but most who were forced into a migrant labour system that tore at the very roots of family.

Despite all this harassment, she still managed to keep links between jailed ANC members and those in exile. She was determined in her cause.

Many men, husbands and sons, would leave wives, mothers and children in the Bantu or rural reserves created to sustain a labour pool to be exploited at mines or farms and allowed to see their families only once at the end of the year.

At times children were born without the knowledge of the father who was kept away from home by migrant labour.

The permit and pass laws barred women from visiting their husbands in the growing mining towns.

This status quo forced some men to have second wives or girlfriends in the mining towns and cities, thus undermining family fabric.

Townships and racial spatial planning

Ladies and gentlemen, today many of the townships represent the shift by the apartheid government to allow certain women

and men to come into the urbanising parts of South Africa as labour.

It is the increased demand for labour as towns and cities grew that led to a shift towards the entry of women into townships and thus the stabilisation of a supply of cheap labour.

This however was controlled to the effect that Black people were kept as far away as possible from the centres of production and white residences in a systematic segregation of group areas at the disadvantage of Black people.

Today these townships still remain far and distant from areas of economic production and are remnants of the ills of colonial spatial planning and land use that seriously challenge our transport planning objectives today.

They remain modern reservoirs of cheap labour whose restructuring and modernisation will come at an insurmountable cost to government and society in general.

It is within SOWETO, South Africa's biggest township that Mama Sisulu lived all her adult life.

Townships as reservoirs of cheap labour

Distinguished guests

Black people were treated only as animals fit for the exploitation of their labour and worse so no space existed for neither gender inclusivity nor gender neutrality.

Triple oppression of women

In fact, we have in South Africa always analysed the condition of black women as a triple oppression, because black women were oppressed as black persons, as women in general and also as cheap exploitable labour.

This became an oppressive and exploitative system based on race gender and class.

This is the legacy of apartheid policy that Mama Sisulu was committed to fighting all her life.

It is what we are today committed to reversing, although it remains an uphill battle given the extent to which such racist practices remain entrenched as we have noticed in the aviation sector in South Africa.

Mama Sisulu a leader in the Democratic Movement

Ladies and gentlemen, it is impossible to speak of Mama Sisulu without speaking of the movement she was a part of and a movement which she led.

She belonged to the generation of Oliver Tambo and Nelson Mandela and the African National Congress that led the struggle for liberation in South Africa.

In 1944 at the first ANC Youth League Conference Ma Sisulu was the only woman in attendance at that watershed conference.

When most of the ANC's senior leadership had been detained and the African National Congress banned Mama Sisulu was there to give hope to many South Africans through her undying activism and leadership.

In fact in 1948 when the ANC Women's League was formed, Ma Sisulu joined as a member and this confirmed her activism in women issues.

Her role remains especially important in our understanding of the struggle for the liberation of women in South Africa.

Mama Sisulu's role in negotiations

It will also be remiss of us to neglect Mama Sisulu's role in the negotiations for a new, non-racial, non-sexist and inclusive political and economic dispensation for South Africa.

She, like Dr Mandela and many within the Mass Democratic Movement had convinced South Africans to avoid a blood bath by opting for a negotiated settlement.

It is believed by some that the negotiations process introduced compromises with far reaching consequences against black women and black people in general.

By definition and inevitably radical change means that there must take place a titanic battle for victory over each other and

one another between and among the forces representing the new, and the forces seeking to preserve the old order.

Logically in pursuit of their respective and antagonistic outcomes, each of these contending forces would seek victory over each other, in a zero sum game.

Very often these forces, the old and the new enter into unavoidable compromises which throw up their own challenges.

No radical change is worthy of its name if it does not know when to enter into such compromises, and gets lost about what it should do afterwards, in pursuit of its strategic goals.

Yet without these compromises South Africa could have had dire consequences of conflict and immense devastation.

It is the wisdom of such leaders as Mama Sisulu that we should credit for the peaceful transition we have enjoyed as a people.

In the generation of Mama Sisulu South Africa had been fortunate to have the leadership who displayed the following qualities:

Served the people with an untiring commitment with no demand for material benefits for themselves;

Ensuring that the struggle for change remained focused on fundamental goals and

Remained flexible in order to adapt to demands of circumstance while remaining committed to the original objectives for change.

She was indeed an outstanding agent of change and a democrat.

Conclusion

Programme Director, ladies and gentlemen may all at this Summit today enjoy the peace we have so achieved as a result of the undying commitment to peace and prosperity as Mama Sisulu and many of her peers would have loved.

Let us take with us the memories of this day in South Africa and all dedicate ourselves to fight gender inequality wherever we shall be.

Let us here commit ourselves individually and collectively to a world where all shall live as equals to share the world's and our individual countries' resources fairly and inclusively.

Let us take the lessons embedded in the story of Mama Sisulu and spread the message of gender equality and inclusion across the world.

Radical modernisation of the mass skills base remains critical especially among the previously disadvantaged.

We need to systematically address the challenge of the empowerment of the youth.

We need to significantly reduce the racial and gender inequalities in terms of wealth, income and opportunity.

I thank you all