



**MINISTRY
TRANSPORT
OF SOUTAFRICA**

REPUBLIC

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**KEYNOTE ADDRESS FROM THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF
TRANSPORT, MR MKHULEKO HLENGWA MP, FOR THE 2024
SACAA NATIONAL AVIATION GENDER SUMMIT**

Event: 2024 NAGS
Date: Wednesday, 21 August 2024
**Venue: Premier Splendid Hotel, Umhlanga, KwaZulu-
Natal**
Theme: "Lift as We Rise: The Journey to 2030"
Event Time: 09:00 – 17:00

Acknowledgments:

Programme Director;
The SACAA Chairperson, Mr Ernest Khosa;
SACAA Board Member, Ms Bulelwa Koyana;
The SACAA Director of Civil Aviation, Ms Poppy Khoza;
The Department of Transport- Civil Aviation Branch;
Chief Executives from the sector present this morning;
Captains of Industry;
Distinguished Moderators, Speakers, and Panellists;
Executives and aviation professionals;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen;

Good morning!

Introduction

Thank you for the warm welcome. It is a great pleasure to address you today as we delve into matters of significant importance—issues that demand our immediate attention, particularly those related to gender equality within the aviation sector. I am hoping that this women's month has been a time to celebrate and reflect the progress made by South Africa's Women, and for you in this room.

It has been a busy period for my team as we look at settling into the Transport portfolio. I am excited to be a part of this portfolio, which forms the backbone of South Africa's economy. Minister Creecy and I look forward to working with you as you put your strategies and plans into action, I am certainly aware that all of us at the Department of Transport and SACAA are ready to get to work.

Civil Aviation significance

I acknowledge the SACAA Board Chairperson, Mr Ernest Khosa, and can vouch to him that we would never ignore the contribution that the civil aviation sector provides to the global economy. The International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) indicates that the global Air Transport sector supports 65.5 million jobs with US\$ 2.7 trillion in global economic activity. There are over 10 million women and men working within the industry to ensure 120 000 flights and 12 million passengers a day are carried safely to their destinations.

In this being my first formal engagement with the Civil Aviation community, let me take this opportunity to congratulate the SACAA, the country's national civil aviation regulator, for putting this important gathering together. I would also like to congratulate the entity for the various organisational successes, and for ensuring that our South African skies remain safe and secure in the almost 26 years since the Regulator was established.

As the Executive Authority and the Department responsible for enabling the transport economy of this country, we are looking to the Regulator and the people in this room to ensure that our State continues to achieve a safe and secure aviation sector.

The country's safety and security oversight

South Africa's oversight safety standards are well documented, with the States 91.11% achievement on the oversight safety systems from the last ICAO audit in 2023 known across the globe. Our skies are the best on the African continent and ranked in the top 20 internationally.

While these are achievements that we should continue to celebrate and acknowledge, there is more that is required from us as a sector. We have not fully achieved success if others are left behind or are excluded. Which brings me to the purpose of today's engagement.

Challenge towards a transforming aviation sector

As a Deputy Minister and a South African citizen I am proud that within our Cabinet, half of the Ministers are women. In Parliament, in the judiciary, in the public service, in the armed forces, in the police and in many local councils, we are also getting closer to that gender parity. The challenge now is: when can we see this also being reflected in the aviation industry?

Celebrating aviation game-changers

Ladies and gentlemen, the aviation industry has in the past been characterised as being male dominated. I am very encouraged by the progress our government is demonstrating by leading the gender challenge from the front. As you may well be aware of this, all three aviation entities are led by women. Capable and high achievers in their own right. We thank them for paving the way for some of the much-needed changes in the overall transport industry.

Ms. Poppy Khoza, Director of the South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA); Ms. Nozipho Mdawe, CEO of Air Traffic and Navigation Services (ATNS); and Ms. Mpumi Mpofu, Chief Executive of Airports Company South Africa (ACSA), we are proud of you. Your exceptional contributions have laid a solid foundation for the continued transformation of our sector. Thanks to your efforts, I am confident we will see further progress and innovation in this vital industry.

Reflecting on Progress

As we mark the fifth year of this summit, it is crucial that we reflect on the progress we have made within our various departments and organisations. We must ask ourselves whether we have done enough.

In the last five years, have we removed barriers that may have been preventing women from entering and advancing in the sector? Are women well represented across all roles and levels, from leadership to technical and operational positions? Have we done enough to educate, encourage, and recruit young women into the sector? Are we doing enough to collaborate with schools, educational institutions, and other government bodies to promote the inclusion of women in the sector? And once we have attracted the right candidates, are we offering enough training and support to retain them? Are we celebrating and acknowledging the contributions of women who are making significant strides in the sector? These are the questions that I hope will be answered from the different panellists and experts at this gathering.

We must be accountable

It is important that we remain accountable to ensure that we achieve our long-term vision for gender equality in aviation. This can only be accomplished through strategic planning and a commitment to achieving these objectives.

Empowering women has a significant ripple effect—not only within our organisations, which are key drivers of economic growth and critical components of international trade and tourism, but also at the grassroots level, impacting the very fabric of our society.

Global Gender statistics

According to the World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap 2023 report, Sub-Saharan Africa's (gender) parity score is the sixth-highest among the eight regions at 68.2%, ranking above Southern Asia and the Middle East and North Africa. Progress in the region has been uneven. Namibia, Rwanda and South Africa, along with 13 other countries, have closed more than 70% of the overall gender gap. The Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mali and Chad are the lowest-performing countries, with scores below 62%.

Gender Parity needs for us to think about new and innovative ways to bring women into formal employment , over 60% of women in Africa are currently working in the informal sector, that's more half of our continent's talent pool. At the current rate of progress, it will take 102 years to close the gender gap in Sub-Saharan Africa. This is a statistic that should awaken our fires to act, I think that we often find acting a mammoth task but it begins with all of us implementing change in our immediate environments, every day wasted is a day added to 102 years.

Current licensing statistics

Ladies and gentlemen, the Director of Civil Aviation earlier shared with us the gender make up of our industry locally. In South Africa, out of the 25 830 licensed personnel at the end of July 2024, only 5 067 are female. This includes pilots, engineers, air traffic officers and cabin crew. Of course, we must celebrate this improvement to almost 20% of women occupying technical roles in the industry but we have a challenge here.

This brings to mind the late His Excellency Prince Mangosuthu Buthelezi's words on Women's Day in 2013, he said and I quote "It is therefore not enough to write into law that a woman must receive the same compensation and benefits for work done as her male counterpart. We need to deal with the social mindset that still subjugates women in the workplace, in the home, in the Church and in the marketplace, even in the intangible ways of expecting less from a woman or considering her less committed."

His Excellency also lamented in the same speech, and rightfully so, that “Often, when it comes to the crunch, we in South Africa still prefer to send a man to do the job”. While these statistics are not a reflection of our commitment to gender equity, it does need this particular industry and for all us to reflect if we still prefer to send men to do the job? We truly can make a difference as decision makers and as citizens in our immediate environments, at home, at work and everyday interactions. South African women are strong, capable and dedicated.

Ladies and gentleman, we are left with just 6 years to 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals demand of us to up this percentage to 50%. In a country greatly affected by unemployment and its affects being continuously higher amongst women, especially the youth, the aviation sector is presented with a unique opportunity to empower young women from all walks of life who wish to be a part of this sector.

The most critical question we must answer today is how are we going to use the next six years to multiply these numbers to reach the required goal? Will we take 102 years to reach this 50% goal as an industry in South Africa?

Mentorship and Skills Development

With this said, I am encouraged by the ongoing bursaries, mentorship and skills development programs that have been initiated by all of our aviation entities to encourage a new generation of professionals, especially in previously disadvantaged communities. We acknowledge the efforts from entities such as the SACAA, who have dedicated funds and personnel in creating initiatives such as the career awareness programmes, where there has been a concerted effort to drive and promote female participation in this industry. The Director has reliably informed me that the Captains of Industry will today also share how they are fairing in their own organisations. This is encouraging because we are holding each other accountable and hence it is impossible for us not to achieve our goals.

Proactive measures are crucial in reshaping a sector that has traditionally been dominated by men. The dedication to creating opportunities and fostering a more inclusive environment is commendable and marks a significant step forward. Across the broader transport sector—encompassing taxis, railways, and bus operations—aviation stands out amongst leading modes of transport in its commitment to gender diversity and inclusion. Transformation in the aviation sector is crucial not only for industry to grow, but the economy to grow. We are aware that when more women work, economies grow. I believe that as part of the electoral mandate from our recent election, South Africans need us to grab opportunities to do our part in lowering unemployment in the country.

Conclusion

As I conclude, ladies and gentlemen, it is our intention to ensure that the solid strategic objectives of this office are effectively implemented. It is crucial that we move from having exemplary laws on paper to realising tangible results on the ground. To this end, we will work tirelessly to bridge the gap between policy and practice, ensuring that our aviation sector not only meets but exceeds expectations in all areas and set mandates. Even on matters of diversity and inclusion, I pledge my support in every way that matters. Shirley Chisholm I am told once said “If you don’t have seat at the table , bring a folding chair” but I think South African women do not bring folding chairs they bring wooden benches, a seat for the next woman coming into the room.

I, too, look forward to the different outcomes from the sessions today. Let us continue to build an inclusive and supportive South Africa for everyone who lives in it!

I thank you.

-ENDS-