



**Address by Minister of Justice and Correctional Services, Ronald Lamola (MP),  
Marking the launch of Human Rights Month on Friday, 5 March 2021  
At Dimbaza, Eastern Cape**

Minister of Sports, Arts and Culture, Nathi Mthethwa  
Eastern Cape MEC of Sports, Arts and Culture, Fezeka Nkomonye  
Senior officials in the Departments of Sports Arts and Culture  
Senior officials in the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen

As we celebrate this very important month of our young democracy, it is deeply fulfilling that we do in the name of our stalwart and heroine, Mme Charlotte Manye Maxeke. This year's human rights month is celebrated under the theme: ***“THE YEAR OF CHARLOTTE MAXEKE: PROMOTING HUMAN RIGHTS IN THE AGE OF COVID-19”***.

Our society today is socially different to the one in which Mme Maxeke lived in. I say socially different but not structural different. The edifice of apartheid is still hovering in our social structure. Either through colonial names in our communities, or by our own behavior as citizens. In spite of this being the 27<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our democracy, we still see acts of racism.

We are still building a nation on the foundation of Ubuntu to transcend beyond xenophobia and tribalism.

In our democracy, there are still rogue elements hell-bent on undermining the struggles of Mme Maxeke and her heroic generation. This they do through acts of domestic violence and femicide. We have to defeat acts of domestic violence and femicide for the whole nation to celebrate the hard fought for human rights.

Ladies and Gentlemen;

COVID-19 has come with so many disruptive elements in our lives which led to the limitation of our human rights. Some of the activities that were legal before COVID 19 are now illegal. The new normal is not normal, the world has become a strange place.

In the same vein, we have seen how the scientific community has been able to pull together with supersonic speed and produced vaccines that are beginning to take us back to life as we know it. But once again, the greatest threat to us overcoming this pandemic is that of richer nations stockpiling the collective work of the scientific community for themselves. It is within this context that our government is calling for the waving of intellectual property rights to allow all nations of the world to have access to the IPS to manufacture the vaccines.

It is perhaps fitting that we recall that Mme Charlotte Maxeke firmly asserted what should be the work of activists and broadly when one can call problem solvers in our societies, one think of scientists and the like. She said and I quote, “ ***this work is not for yourselves, kill that spirit of self, and do not live above your people but live with them if you can rise bring someone with you***” close quote.

In many ways, COVID-19 has shown us that there is no space for the spirit of self, and certainly rising alone is unsustainable. We have to conquer COVID-19 as United Nations of the world.

The impact of COVID-19 on human rights takes places in the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the country’s constitution - a landmark timeline of an important document that has inspired and transformed the lives of millions of South African citizens. Over the past 26 years,

much progress has been achieved, resulting in a number of progressive improvements in people's lives.

The constitution is a document that really values human dignity, equality, non-racism, non-sexism and it has laid a foundation for entrenching fundamental human rights across the entire social spectrum of our country. It obliges government to set people free from poverty and ensure that all citizens live their lives as they choose.

The Constitution and the rule of law are sacrosanct components of our democracy and people in the country must respect these principles. To allow anything else will lead to anarchy and open the floodgates to a counter revolution. Resolution of the Land question will restore the human dignity of black South Africans who were dispossessed of their land.

The pandemic has brought into sharp focus the complexities of entrenching a human rights based society in our communities. For instance, the perceived decline in the reportage of gender based violence in our communities has in reality brought spot on, the nature of gender based violence. Statistics really point to the fact that more often than not, the perpetrators of gender based violence are individuals who are known to victims and survivors.

This inevitably begs the question, has our constitution permeated every facet of society? From the church right into the household, do the principles of our constitution enjoy hegemony? Put simply, are people and leaders in our communities able to take a step back and ask what non-sexism means to me and my family. As a family or household, how do we advance non-sexism.

Program Director I am of the view that these are important questions we must internalize. The National Development Plan 2030 makes the point that families, communities, state institutions and civil organisations, all have to play a role in making citizens understand the values in the Constitution and fostering a culture of respect for human rights in order to build a harmonious, cohesive and equitable society.

As we launch Human Rights Month 2021, let every citizen be concerned about entrenching human rights in the country. Let each of us say, as long as there are still those whose rights are violated and undermined, the struggle continues. We are standing on the shoulders of giants, including Mme Charlotte Maxeke, and in her memory, let us recommit ourselves as activists for Human Rights for all.

I thank you.