



**Address By Minister of Justice and Correctional Services Ronald Lamola (MP)
on Human Rights Day , 21 March 2021**

As we celebrate this very important month of our nascent democracy, it is somewhat 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 still remains heavily entrenched in our everyday experiences. Either through colonial names in our communities or by our own behavior as citizens. In spite of this being the 27th anniversary of our democracy, many of us know too well that racism breathes and lives amongst us.

In spite of our proclamation and commitment to Ubuntu, xenophobia and tribalism still find expression through our actions as citizens. Our humanity which binds us together is increasingly becoming an invisible thread.

In our democracy, there are still a few rogue elements hell-bent on undermining the struggles of Mme Maxeke and her heroic generation. This they attempt through relentless efforts and shenanigans aimed at undermining one of the basic principles in a democracy, equality before the law.

They go as far as casting aspersions on the judiciary and endeavor to undermine decisions of the court to circumvent the rule of law. The generation of Mme Maxeke fought hard for the rights of all South Africans to be equal before the law and we should never allow their struggles to be in vain.

The impact of COVID-19 on human rights takes places in the 25th 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 established a fertile ground 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 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.

Ladies and gentlemen as country we favoured by progressiveness, it is no coincide that International Women's Day falls within our Human Rights Month. The roots of International Womens Day originate from the Socialist Party of America organizing a a 1908 garment workers strike, which inspired a, International Socialist Women's Conference in 1909, where a group of German socialists (including Clara Zetkin, Luise Ziets, Paula Thiede and Käte Duncker) proposed an International Women's Day. I have no doubt that even the work of our own Charlotte Maxeke should be viewed within this paradigm. Her work as an activist without fail place South Africa on the international stage.

As we celebrate Human Rights Day in 2021, let every citizen be concerned about entrenching human rights in the country through a gendered lens. 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 to be activists for Human Rights for all.

I thank you.