



**7th Helen Joseph Memorial Lecture
Presented by Public Protector Adv Thuli Madonsela at the University
of Johannesburg (UJ), Gauteng Tuesday August 21, 2012**

***“Following in the Footsteps of Helen Joseph: The Place of South
African Women leaders in our democracy.”***

***Chairperson of today’s proceedings and Dean of the Faculty of Humanities, Prof Rory
Ryan;***

Vice-Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, Prof Ihron Rensburg;

Deputy Vice Chancellor of the University of Johannesburg, Prof Angina Parekh;

Director: Centre for Social Development in Africa, Prof Leila Patel;

University management;

Distinguished guests, among them Mrs Zanele Mbeki;

Members of the Student Representative Council;

Members of the academic community;

Students;

Members of the media;

Ladies and gentlemen

Reflecting on the legacy of a giant

How do you follow in the footsteps of a giant such as Helen Joseph? Our dialogue today focuses on *“Following on the Footsteps of Helen Joseph: The Place of South African Women Leaders in our Democracy.”* The timing of the memorial lecture on Helen Joseph, one of the heroines and heroes to whom we owe our constitutional democracy, could not be more appropriate. This year’s women’s month is dedicated to reflecting on the ground we have covered 56 years since Helen Joseph, Lilian Ngoyi, Rahima Moosa and Sophie de Bruyn (Williams) gallantly led a march by 20 000 women in protest against pass laws and related apartheid oppression. It is also the year on which as a nation, we have been reflecting on 18 years of democracy and the extent to which the constitutional promise of a better life for all has become a reality for the average person.

To Helen Joseph and others, we owe the gift of constitutional democracy and a Constitution about which American judge, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, recently said the following:

“Egyptians, who are selecting a team to draft a new constitution, should not consider the US’s iconic document but instead the ‘great piece of work’ completed in South Africa in 1996.” (Mail & Guardian Online 24 Feb 2012).

As women of South Africa, particularly those in decision-making or leadership the baton has been passed to us to take our democracy to the next level. It our time to act! In Zulu we say: *“Indlela ibuzwa kwabaphambili”*. This loosely translates to “you ask for directions from those that have travelled before you”. It is accordingly befitting that as we take our rightful place in shaping and consolidating democracy, we draw lessons from those that walked before us.

Standing on the shoulders of giants such as Helen Joseph and all the women who paved the way for us is the easy part. That is why as women in decision-making or leadership today, we look taller than we are. But following on their giant footsteps is easier said than done.

Whenever I reflect on the courageous acts of women such as Helen Joseph, Lillian Ngoyi, Charlotte Maxeke, Albertina Sisulu, Ruth First, First Shulamith Muller, Francis Baard, Winnie Mandela, Victoria Mxenge and Priscilla Jana, among others, in the face of the vicious mighty apartheid state, I feel like a dwarf. But I find comfort in the fact that, because of their gallant sacrifices, women in leadership situations today are not called upon to be half as brave as Helen Joseph and her contemporaries. They were the trail blazers who ensured that our generation has a trail to follow.

From Tea-makers to decision-makers

If we are to reflect meaningfully on the possibility of today’s women leaders walking in the footsteps of Helen Joseph, it may help to firstly familiarize ourselves with her work and specifically, what she stood for.

But how do you summarise the legacy of such a giant, who resolutely and successfully took a stand against sexism and racism at a time when women of her race, class and generation seemed to accept both as a way of life? This is a woman who stands tall as one of the few recipients of the ANC’s highest medal of honour, the *Isithwalandwe* award, bestowed in recognition of her devotion to the liberation of struggle as a symbol of defiance, integrity and courage.

Speaking during Helen Joseph’s funeral in December 1992, fellow treason trialist, who later became democratic South Africa’s first President, Nelson Mandela, said the following:

“Helen challenged the paternalism of our society and left a legacy that the struggle for the emancipation of women had to be side by side with the struggle to liberate the people of South Africa. She believed that the two processes were inseparable.”

Perhaps the best place to start is my encounter with the icon at her house around 1989. She must have been about 81 and struggling with ill health then yet she distinctly struck me as resolute, passionate and committed to a better South Africa as ever.

A part of our conversation I recall vividly to this day is the story she told me on how women in the ANC forced their way from tea-makers to decision-makers. She informed me that women’s presence at ANC meetings was initially confined to the status of tea-makers. This changed, she said, the day women rebelled against making tea and demanded a role reversal. The women

asked the men to make tea while they (the women) took charge of the meeting. From that day on women were allowed to take part in the meetings.

I never verified this historic incident. It could be one of those stories where the hunter's tale differs from the lion's version. But the story resonated with me so much so that it became a central theme in a project I've been intermittently working on since then focusing on leadership lessons from women who paved the way. The original title was "No more tea-makers". I must indicate though that the reality that women graduated from many years of tea-making to decision-makers is not in dispute. This is a well documented fact. A recent article penned by the Spokesperson of the ANC.

Women's League says the following:

"...when the ANC was first established women were not allowed to be members, they had to be satisfied playing a background role, serving tea at meetings instead of actively taking part."

During our encounter, Helen Joseph also spoke fondly about her first contact with Mama Albertina Sisulu whom she described as a shy girl who bloomed into a strong graceful leader. She was generally affirming when she spoke about the women she had worked with over the years, among them Lilian Ngoyi. She was equally passionate about the need to tackle racism and sexism concurrently and for women and men to tackle this side by side. She blamed the deplorable conditions of African women on the intersection of race and gender oppression.

One of the things that struck me about Helen Joseph beyond her resoluteness, passion and commitment, was her ability to transcend race, gender, class and nationality boundaries and to collaborate meaningfully across these boundaries.

Taking a stand against sexism and racism

Born and educated in England in 1905, she arrived and settled in SA around the age of 25 after a three year teaching stint in India. After briefly serving in the war, she became a social worker. Helen Joseph then joined the garment workers union where she worked with Solly Sachs among others. Appalled by state-orchestrated injustices against the black majority and particularly by the poverty stricken conditions of workers and African women, she became a strong advocate for social justice and the eradication of apartheid and sexism.

Her activism saw her become a founder member of the Congress of Democrats, where she served with other liberation struggle stalwarts such as Bram Fischer. She was also a founder member of the Federation of South African Women (FEDSAW) in which she served as the Secretary General. It was in this capacity that she co-led the iconic women's march of 1956 which saw 20 000 women descend on the Union Buildings in Pretoria. It is said that the then Prime Minister JG Strydom ran away leaving his secretary to receive the women's petition. It is also said that the women's spirit was not dampened and instead that defiantly sang a song "*Wathint' Abafazi Wathint'imbokodo* (Now you have touched the women, you've struck a rock). The song has come to symbolize the strength and courage of South African women.

Helen Joseph played a central role in the drafting of the Women's Charter of 1954 and the Freedom Charter of 1955. She is said to have been one of the persons that read out, at the Kliptown gathering, draft provisions that formed the basis of the Freedom Charter that was adopted on 26 June 1955.

One of the 156 persons that were arrested and charged with high treason in the 1956 treason trial, Helen Joseph was banned and placed under house arrest for almost 30 years. The last banning order was lifted around the age of 80. SA History Online adds the following:

“Helen's life became a long saga of police persecution. She was the first person to be placed under house arrest in 1962, and she survived several assassination attempts, including bullets shot through her bedroom window late at night and a bomb wired to her front gate”.

Despite all of this Helen Joseph remained resolute in her quest for a just and inclusive society and her belief in the wrongful and unjust nature of apartheid. She also remained passionate about and committed to seeing the birth of the new South Africa she had perilously dedicated her life to. Even though I met her during her twilight years, I left with the distinct impression that she felt it was all worth it and that the better country she dedicated her life to was possible. A few months later, Nelson Mandela was released and the rest is history. Sadly, Helen Joseph never lived to see the first democratic elections on April 27, 1994 as she died on Christmas day in 1992.

Parallels Lessons for today's women leaders

How do women leaders of today follow in Helen Joseph's giant footsteps? We must acknowledge that there are parallels and differences in the contexts within which Helen Joseph's leadership was exercised and that in which contemporary women leaders operate.

One of the key similarities lies in the position of power and privilege. As a white woman from a relatively affluent background, Helen Joseph was placed in a position of relative power and privilege.

She used her position of privilege as a vantage point to lift others, dedicating her whole life to fighting injustices mainly focusing on race and gender oppression. As a white relatively affluent woman, white women had just been granted the right to vote, she could have said that this is not my fight. She could have focused on her family and as was the trend in her time. Instead, she leveraged her position of relative power and privilege to take a stand against wrongdoing and to actively bring about a new order. She gave a voice to the voiceless.

Many women leaders today occupy positions of power and privilege. In that regard, they are in the same position as Helen Joseph. The challenge is to leverage the position of power to give a voice to the voiceless and, where you have authority, to use such authority to make a difference.

During the constitution-making process we saw women involved in the drafting process use that space to mainstream gender and issues of broader social justice. Women Ministers, judges, legislatures and those in oversight bodies also have an opportunity to use their spaces to bring to the fore issues of gender inequality and the concerns of disadvantaged groups in society. They also have an opportunity to take a firm stand against wrongdoing.

While there are many similarities, it is equally true that the terrain within which women leaders of today must reflect on their role has shifted immensely. This means that in many instances the strategies need not be marches and other acts of defiance that women of Helen Joseph's time were forced to employ. They were faced with an intransigent state that was not only unjust but also unwilling to engage in dialogue. Their position was compounded by the fact that it was a time when society broadly believed that a “women's place was in a kitchen”. Incidentally this is

one of the stereotypes they defied in their slogans and songs during the historic women's march.

Today we have a Constitution that does not stop at outlawing sexism and racism but also imposes the responsibility for the achievement of equality. The Constitution commits our society to social justice and a better life for all.

The preamble to our globally celebrated Constitution makes the following commitment:

*"We, the people of South Africa,
Recognise the injustices of our past;
Honour those who suffered for justice and freedom in our land;
Respect those who have worked to build and develop our country; and
Believe that South Africa belongs to all who live in it, united in our diversity.
We therefore, through our freely elected representatives, adopt this Constitution as the
supreme law of the Republic so as to-
Heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice
and fundamental human rights;
Lay the foundations for a democratic and open society in which government is based on the will
of the people and every citizen is equally protected by law; Improve the quality of life of all
citizens and free the potential of each person; and Build a united and democratic South Africa
able to take its rightful place as a sovereign state in the family of nations.*

This and other provisions of the Constitution we proudly adopted 18 years ago as the roadmap to guide us towards the new society, constitute what we often refer to as the constitutional promise. Part of the Constitutional promise lies in the justiciable bill of rights in Chapter 3 of the Constitution. The bill of rights covers the comprehensive rights in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and more. Worth noting is the fact that the justiciable rights go beyond civil and political rights such freedom and security of the person, equality and human dignity. They include social and economic rights which are accorded the same weight as other fundamental human rights and freedoms.

Socio-economic rights relate to what we regard as bread and butter matters at the Public Protector SA. Captured mainly between Sections 22 and 27 of the Constitution, socio-economic rights include basic entitlements such as the right to access to adequate housing, health care, food, water and social security and education. Most of the children's rights in Section 28 are also economic in nature. The key to the realization of socio-economic rights is positive action primarily to be taken by the state to eradicate inherited disparities that prevent many in society, particularly the victims of past unjust laws, from practically enjoying these rights.

The Constitution goes further to define the character of the state in the envisaged constitutional democracy. This is the state that is meant to be optimally positioned to deliver the constitutional promise. The founding values in section 1 of the Constitution set out non negotiable values for both the society we envision and the parameters for the exercise of public power. Such core values include supremacy of the Constitution and the rule of law, open democracy, and public accountability. They also include human dignity, the achievement of equality and freedom.

The Constitution is generally strong in regard to defining parameters for the exercise of public power and accountability for the exercise of such power. For example, chapter 10 lays down principles of public administration while chapter 5, particularly section 96, thereof, stipulates minimum requirements for ethical exercise of public power by the executive. Section 96 goes

further to provide for an Executive Code of Ethics.

An important provision on the character of the state that is unfortunately not given much attention is section 237. This section provides that “*all constitutional provisions should be performed diligently and without delay*”.

With regard to its enforcement the Constitution introduces innovative multiple public accountability mechanisms that reinforce the traditional checks and balances seeking to constrain the exercise of state power. These as we all know include diffused state power involving separation of power between three branches of government, including an independent judiciary with judicial review powers of executive and legislative actions. Key among the innovative accountability mechanisms introduced in the 1993 and 1996 Constitutions is a set of constitutional institutions whose role is to support and strengthen. Most of these are entrenched in Chapter 9 of the Constitution which has earned them the nickname, Chapter 9 institutions.

The Public Protector is one of the Chapter 9 institutions. The role of the Public Protector is to help the people to exact accountability and justice in the exercise of state power. The specific constitutional mandate is to investigate any alleged or suspected improper or prejudicial conduct in state affairs, to report on that conduct and to take appropriate remedial action.

Women leaders today accordingly operate in a context where there is only an enabling constitutional environment, there are also enabling laws and policies. Not only is the intransigent apartheid state gone, in many instances women themselves form part of the state and are decision-makers behind many state actions.

For example women constitute about 43% of members of Parliament, more that 40% of Cabinet ministers and more than 25% of members of the judiciary. More than 50% of the premiers heading provinces are women.

Women also occupy more than 40% of council positions in local government with many of them being mayors and speakers. A number of constitutional bodies are headed by women. For example, the IEC and Public Protector are headed by women and many statutory bodies are also headed by women.

It is true that full gender parity remains an aspiration but with women placed in decision-making opportunities in the state and society, they are not always kicking from outside as was the case during Helen Joseph’s time. The strategies to be employed to make a difference accordingly need not be as extreme as organizing a 20 000 women’s march.

What are women leaders called upon to do today?

We have already established that it was human solidarity or empathy that inspired Helen Joseph to act when confronted with the deplorable conditions of the victims of apartheid and sexism. You will agree with me that the better deal Helen Joseph and others sought to achieve is the vision of our society captured in the Constitution we adopted in 1993 as an interim Constitution and as a final Constitution in 1994 Central to the new society we sought to become are values such as human dignity, human solidarity and social justice.

What then are the human conditions that should be tackled by today’s women leaders, particularly those in public power?

Today is certainly better than yesterday. We have clearly gone a long way towards the vision of

the society Helen Joseph and others sought to achieve. This is true on many fronts. One of the key areas of progress recognized by the World Bank, among others, is delivery on social security. Through social grants such as old age, disability and child grants, many families, are saved from starvation. Under the RDP housing programme, many people have received free homes making them property owners despite being poor.

The very issue of women having transitioned from tea-making to decision-making in many structures within the state and civil society is an achievement. There are other indicators of strides made in regard to putting women in power and decision-making in addition to the examples of significant improvements outlined above. For example, women are significantly represented at all levels of the public service, including the highest levels of decision-making. Even in the private sector and the judiciary where representation at the highest levels of decision-making is relatively lagging, we must acknowledge that there has been a vast improvement in the last 18 years. The same applies to gender inclusiveness in education, the professions and business ownership and control.

But on the issues of poverty inequality and unemployment is still depressing. Not only are they issues that bothered Helen Joseph and her contemporaries, they also constitute the focus of this year's women's month's reflection on 56 years since the 1956 women's march.

Evidence of lack of or slow progress is available from various data sources, including household surveys and employment statistics. Two reports released by the National Planning Commission in the last 10 months reveal that we are very far from the constitutional promise or South African dream on all the three issues of poverty, inequality and unemployment. The report also paints a grim picture on other socio-economic rights, particularly health and education. According to the National Planning Commission's Diagnostic Review Report, poverty rates among women-headed households are higher than average and women continue to earn less than men even though differences in years of education have been narrowed. The report reveals that broad unemployment remains a critical challenge mostly affecting young black women living outside of urban areas. Women, the report also noted, still earn less than men on average and only 18 percent of managers in the South African workforce were women.

The reality we witness on the ground as we investigate maladministration and interface with society as part of stakeholder dialogues in pursuit of my office's duty to be accessible to all persons and communities, we are confronted with extreme indicators of poverty, inequality and unemployment.

A relevant question for women in positions of leadership, particularly within the state, is why is progress delayed with regarding to delivering the constitutional promise to all particularly the most disadvantaged in our society?

Can we blame the legacy of apartheid for persisting conditions of abject poverty, inequality and employment that many are still trapped in? My view is that yes we can blame some of it on apartheid? But can we blame all of it on apartheid? My view is that some of the blame must go to actions taken or not taken by state actors in the last 18 years. Surely we cannot blame apartheid for the fact that 18 years into democracy there are still rural children studying in mud schools or sharing class rooms between three or more classes. I also do not believe that apartheid is responsible for lack of medicines in hospitals or for RDP houses that are paid for and not delivered or delivered in deplorable quality.

The view taken by the Public Protector team is that maladministration is a major culprit derailing

delivery on the constitutional promise. I further believe that the place of women leaders in South Africa today includes playing their part in arresting maladministration, including its extreme variations such as corruption and abuse of state resources.

Let me share the story of a grandmother. I will call her Gogo Glamini, the ideal complainant we target in our services at the Public Protector SA.

We visited Gogo Dlamini's house in one of the provinces a few months ago. A pensioner dependant on the government old age grant and sole breadwinner in a family of 7, Gogo Dlamini gives us a glimpse into socio-economic rights challenges in contemporary South Africa. We had been called in to inspect examples of systemic service failure due to corrupt practices and other forms of maladministration. Key concerns related to sanitation and the provision of adequate RDP housing.

Gogo Dlamini's family was using the bucket toilet system, although there was a toilet meant for a waterborne sanitation system in the yard. She complained that for many years she had been unable to use the toilet built for her because the piping system ended at the front of the toilet and was not connected to any reticulation system. She said the bucket system she had been provided with as an interim measure was not ideal as the bucket was left uncollected for weeks on end leading to children relieving themselves all over the place. She also often dug holes to empty the bucket only to find that when children played, they often brought out the excrement. She informed us that four members of her family had TB, blaming the spread of the TB on her family's deplorable conditions.

Could Gogo Dlamini's plight have been prevented or expeditiously alleviated?

A few weeks ago, two grandmothers came to an inspection *in loco* we were conducting on RDP housing challenges and asked for blankets and food. They explained that a few days earlier, on Mandela day, they had been denied blankets and food parcels from government. The goods had been selectively delivered by a woman councilor acting in her capacity as a member of woman's wing of a political party. They alleged that they had been excluded on political grounds. I quickly arranged two blankets and a few items of food and asked my provincial team to help investigate the veracity of the allegations of discrimination on political grounds. As a woman and human being I sincerely hope these deplorable allegations are not true.

If we accept the reality that we are still far from the constitutional promise and the idea that propelled Helen Joseph's generation and further agree that this reality is due to some degree, to acts and omissions of the last 18 years, what role can women leaders of today do to remedy the situation? In playing their part, what lessons can they draw from pioneers such as Helen Joseph?

Taking a principled stand

Not only did Helen Joseph take a principled stand against the oppressive apartheid state but she also dedicated her life to the pursuit of the better world she not only believed was desirable but possible. An unbelievably brave woman, she backed her principled stand with action and was also prepared to pay the price. This was at a time when perilous consequences were guaranteed and not a remote possibility. As we noted earlier, she did pay a heavy price for her efforts.

They had no Constitution to guide them then. Principles, and later the freedom charter guided

their actions. Today we have a constitution, laws and policies to help women leaders take a stand with minimum legitimate resistance. Constitutional provisions such as Section 237, 96 and the bill of rights are useful instruments that can be used for advocacy in pursuit of good governance and discouraging maladministration. These are also powerful for influencing government priorities and ethical conduct to ensure responsive service delivery.

But do women leaders use their positions of power and privilege to take a stand? For example, what do we do when we see mud schools and multiple classes of children having to choose between learning in one classroom and studying under trees 18 years into democracy? Do we accept the excuse that this is a legacy of apartheid or do we see this as an outcome of our failure to put the Constitution first, taking into account that section 237 of the Constitution requires that constitutional obligations be attended to diligently and without delay.

Speaking truth to power

We have established that Helen Joseph represents a generation of women leaders that spoke truth to power at a time when perilous consequences were guaranteed. They do so externally and internally. Externally relates to their challenge to the government of the day. But their action also meant tackling what they viewed as internal wrongs in the liberation movement itself, one of these being sexism. They took a stand at a time when the struggle against sexism was seen as less important. In fact the dominant view then was that non-sexism could overshadow the struggle against racism and therefore needed to be deferred. This had the potential to make them unpopular. Already Helen Joseph had offended her privileged group by fighting against apartheid.

Today's women leaders also often have to speak truth to power. This not only applies to women such as myself as Public Protector and others in oversight bodies, including the judiciary. Women in power structures such as Parliament, the Executive and local government are also called upon to speak truth to power in many instances.

Women need to ask themselves if they are fully using their spaces to speak truth to power when the Constitution and the rule of law are violated. For example, as a woman leader, do you insist on accountability for the proper use of public power and resources regardless of who is involved? We know that it is difficult when comrades and/or former comrades are involved. It must be even more difficult when those involved are men that have supported us and possibly placed us where we are. In such cases women are often expected to act as "mob wives" so to speak. What do you do as a woman leader? Do you avoid rocking the boat or act as a voice of reason?

If you are a decision-maker in organs of state involved in executing public power in legislative and executive capacities, how do you use your power? Do you use it to expand the frontiers of human rights and respect for the rule of law in all circumstances?

In the struggle against corruption and the pursuit of ethical governance, women leaders have an important role. They have a choice between being part of the solution and being part of the problem. It is often said that evil thrives not because evil people are powerful but because good people say or do nothing.

Let us ask some difficult questions to women leaders. What do we do when those that enforce accountability are demonized? Do we blindly join in the chorus or do you ask pertinent questions? Do we insist on analyzing and reviewing questioned decisions to ascertain the

validity of attacks? How often do we appeal to the constitutional provisions on basic people's entitlements and the character of the state to ascertain who is right between the detractors and the impugned oversight body?

What about those instances when pressure is exerted for the extension of political protection to a person or company that has looted public resources thus derailing the delivery of the constitutional promise to our people? Do we speak out or go with the flow for fear of rocking the boat?

Playing our part towards bringing about the better world with integrity

One of the accolades given to Helen Joseph was the recognition of her service with integrity. We often confine integrity to issues of corruption. But integrity goes beyond that. For example using public resources for political advancement cannot be reconciled with integrity. If it is true for example that older persons were denied blankets on political grounds, that cannot be consistent with integrity.

Other allegations of integrity violations we have come across particularly during the public hearings dedicated to RDP housing delivery and other systemic service delivery failures are: Jobs, including internships and EPWP, for party faithful; Denial of services to persons or wards that do not support a party in power at local government levels, Shacks for party cards, and stayed evictions of illegal occupiers of RDP houses when an election is around the corner.

Shortchanging people in service delivery and taking advantage of their lack of sophistication and access to legal representation is also not only unethical but also anathema to the principle of integrity.

It is important that women leaders lead the process of pushing the frontiers of poverty, inequality and unemployment, particularly in spaces where they are the decision-makers.

Acting as change agents that put the Constitution first

Helen Joseph's life story is the story of tirelessly acting as an agent of change. She refused to accept a wrongful status quo and worked for change. Women leaders today are in the same position particularly if they are to make a mark in the fight against maladies that allow poverty, inequality and unemployment to flourish despite the constitutional promise which includes the fulfillment of the potential of every person.

Appealing to the constitutional vision, values and other non-negotiables, is important in this regard. Women leaders are well positioned to lead a paradigm shift towards putting the Constitution first as required by section 237 of the Constitution.

How many of the women in power are informed of the obligation to put the Constitution first and also make it a point that they use their space to remind fellow decision-makers about this obligation. I distinctly recall that under the first administration in the democratic SA, the Mandela administration, there was always a clear commitment to maintaining a balance between a basic needs approach and global competitiveness. Between nice to do massive projects and the dictates of a basic needs approach, do you blindly do what you are told to do or put the Constitution first?

Putting the Constitution first also requires that public power be only used in the public interest.

This includes avoiding conflict of interest as much as possible to ensure decisions are just and fair and not poisoned by private or parochial interests.

Transcending Boundaries and Related Biases

Earlier on I mentioned that one of the remarkable things about Helen Joseph's life was her ability to transcend racial, gender and other boundaries. South Africa was her adopted country yet she got deeply involved in taking the country forward.

More interestingly, she belongs to a generation of women that embraced men as compatriots while remaining alive to gender imbalances and the quest for gender equality.

Women leaders today are also often called upon to transcend social, political, racial and other boundaries to collaborate on issues of principle. Tackling issues such as gender violence and other systemic gender injustices often requires sisterhood across race and political affiliations. This was the ethos that drove the Women's National Coalition in the early nineties. Maladies such as corruption, also requires a united front that transcends boundaries such as political affiliation, gender and the private and public sector divide.

But the key lesson we can draw from this remarkable life is a demonstrable devotion to non-racialism. Helen Joseph was one of our country's bridge builders, particularly in regard to building social cohesion across race. The same challenges and opportunities exist for women today. Race and gender tensions continue to simmer and they need the attention of bridge builders from all walks of life.

Peace Building

Although associated with the defiance campaign, Helen Joseph's generation was really about building a more peaceful and prosperous society. Mass action was taken as a last resort against a belligerent state.

Today's women leaders in communities and the public sector also have a role in peace building. It is important to note that women bear the brunt of violent mass action as vulnerable persons and as care givers in affected families. We've just seen that in the tragic incident at Marikana in the Northwest province.

It is also important to understand that violent protest is unpredictable. The drafters of our constitution created multiple avenues for public accountability with a view to strengthening democracy as a dialogue. Such avenues include the public protector. Women can use the spaces of power available to them to advocate for the exhaustion of avenues for constructive dialogue and using mass action as the last resort. When confronted with a community that was planning to go on strike the day after my visit in Tabazimbu recently, this approach helped prevent the planned strike.

Consolidating the transition from tea makers to decision-makers

The fact that Hellen Joseph was one of the people that read the Freedom Charter in Kliptown is one of the concrete indicators of the transition from tea-makers to decision-makers.

It is worth noting that after making into the mainstream decision-making structures in the liberation movement the women leader pioneers could have opted to quietly fit in and act as

honorary men. Instead they remained change agents. They must have been grateful and loyal to the men that had helped them in and up. They did not let blind loyalty compromise their integrity. One of the issues they persistently raised was the thorny issue of sexism and the need to fight sexism and racism side by side.

Through their courageous and principles action they ensured that the liberation movement was alive to the injustices of patriarchy as much as those of apartheid and colonialism. The ability and willingness to take a stand regardless of whether or not such stand was popular at the time earned them respect consolidating their transition from tea-makers to decision-makers.

Their adoption of a women's charter in 1954, a year before the Freedom Charter further suggests that they maintained parallel actions as women while using the mainstream the space accorded them in the mainstream to influence decisions as women. They did not see advocating gender issues as threatening their new positions.

The same challenges arise for women in mainstream decision-making. This applies whether such decision making structures are in government or in the private sector or community. They also arise in both domestic and international settings. Fitting in without adding value makes a mockery of the argument that putting women in decision making is necessary not only because it is a human right of women

Speaking in Own Authentic Voice

Related to the issue of making a credible transition from tea-making to decision-making, is the challenge of speaking in your own voice. It is clear that Helen Joseph and her colleagues spoke in their own authentic voices. This is evident in the fact that they often took a dissenting view especially on issues of gender equality.

One of the key challenges for women in leadership positions today is to remain true to speak in your own voice. Its often alleged that some women leaders struggle to speak or act authentically. It is said that they serve as proxies for men who have put them in power or who support them. This undermines the ability of these women to make a difference.

When as a woman, you are placed in a position of decision-making its important to use that space meaningfully. When a woman leader acts as a for men that have supported her or their staff, they have not made a full transition from tea-making. In such a case its difficult to make value based decisions or to put the constitution first. When we put the Constitution first, we put people first. As a woman leader you will make a difference if you act authentically and with integrity despite the reality that you can never please everyone.

Conclusion

The life and work of Helen Joseph reminds us of the transition of women from tea-makers to decision-makers. This transition was made possible because women such as Helen Joseph took a stand against injustice and social exclusion. They also took action to bring about the future they believed in. Women leaders today have an opportunity to do the same. As we reflect on 56 years since the historic women's march and 18 years of democracy, it is our time to act as women in decision-making positions. It is clear that although significant progress has been made, we are far from the society that Helen Joseph and others fought for. The levels of poverty, inequality and unemployment we have are a result of more than the legacy of apartheid. Maladministration including corruption in government is responsible for many of the

gaps. We can make a difference to promote good governance. We can do so in our spaces as decision-makers and by joining hands with others. Let us take a stand against wrongdoing and join hands to ensure public accountability, integrity and responsiveness.

Thank you.

**Adv TN Madonsela
Public Protector of the Republic of South Africa**