



PUBLIC PROTECTOR
SOUTH AFRICA

Address by Public Protector Adv. Thuli Madonsela during Women's Month commemoration at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Durban on Tuesday, 26 August 2015

Vice-Chancellor Dr. Albert van Jaarsveld;

Dean of Law, Prof Reddy;

University Council Members;

Academics, Staff of UKZN;

Student Representatives;

Members of the Media;

Ladies and Gentlemen;

It is an honour for me and my team to take part in this event. We would like to thank the university for the Invite.

I am grateful to the university for affording me an opportunity to engage you briefly and also grateful to the fact that we continue to have a partnership with this university through the hosting of the African Ombudsman Research Centre (AORC).

I want to take this moment today now that we are going towards the end of women's month to thank the people of South Africa, particularly women for the unwavering

support and payers we have received as Public Protector South Africa in the last few years.

A good athlete does it for love but the cheering does it all, Thank You. I am every woman is a powerful statement and a fitting song for today's engagement.

Today I will engage you on today's woman in a context of South Africa we want, the Africa we want and the world we want. Every year we celebrate August 9 and we celebrate August as Women's month.

But we tend to talk a lot about 1956 and the great women that led 20 000 women to challenge the President and the whole government for doing wrong. But often we forget that telling what was right or wrong did not start or end in 1956.

As early as 1910, there were two women in this country that started to shake things. They both challenged racism, sexism and social injustice. They were not just concerned about what women were denied but what kind of South Africa they want.

These women asked the government to ensure that the South Africa we have should be where there is social justice, inclusiveness and an improved quality of life for every person all just because they were human beings.

Both of these women thought that if women are ill-treated, it is not only women that suffer, their families, their communities and society as a whole suffers.

They subscribed to a view that if we advance women and ensure that they are not brutalised, it is not just a woman who benefits, it is their children, spouses, families, their communities, the country and the world.

Those two women, that challenged the status quo, it was Charlotte Maxeke and Olive Schreiner.

Women's efforts did not end in 1956 hence the suggestion I am every woman, and every woman has advanced that advocacy, that crusade to change the world.

How many of you know of a woman called Priscilla Jana. How many of you would give up a seat in a bus if Priscilla Jana is standing next to you. Chances are you wouldn't. Because of the focus on women of 1956 we forget heroes amongst us.

Priscilla Jana was a rock-star of defiant legal practise in the midst of apartheid. Incidentally you hear people often say, take it to the Public Protector, from our side it was always where is Priscilla Jana. If thing were done being unjustly, from trade unionists being arrested and detained without trial, the question was always how can we find Priscilla Jana.

When I was a student and worked doing part-timework with the trade union with the National Union of Printers and Allied Workers, I spoke to two women who were shop-stewards and their brothers had been arrested, trialed and sent to death row.

There was no evidence and the evidence used in court was that they are part of a group of people that did this.

As young and inexperienced I was I felt this was unjust, but there was not much I could do about it. I found Priscilla Jana, talked to her about this matter, brought all the documents and she agreed with me and decided to take this matter pro bono.

She realised they had been represented by a young lawyers who hardly understood what was happening and had too many files and that's how they lost the case.

She did not do it for money, not for a position, without looking at who was running the country, what do I say so that people notice me so that when they think of people that can be appointed into a Commission of Enquiry, to Board or to the Judiciary I will also be remembered. They just did what they thought was right.

I am certain that you do know one woman that I am going to mention and perhaps you would not have known her, had she lived amongst us today, Victoria Mxenge.

We all know that she was so brave that when her husband was killed she did not run away. She gravitated towards the storm and took over and cared after the practise, defended those who were detained, arrested and trialed wrongfully during apartheid.

I was fortunate that even though I never met her, I attended her funeral and things that were said about her was so lasting that they created an impression to me about how to use the environment given to you to make the difference.

Charlotte Maxeke, Olive Schreiner, Priscilla Jana, Victoria Mxenge did not seek to be heroes. There were no awards to be given during their time, no prizes and television, so they were not rockstars, it was just about what you think you can do to prevent or alleviate human suffering as part of creating the world we want to live in. They were courageous, compassionate and brought their competence to solve the problem.

Today how many heroes do we have among us that we pass by without knowing who they are or what they do? In today's terms, I will only speak about two women Wendy Applebam and Dr Frene Ginwala.

Not many of us would know her because we are still stuck with the women of 1956 as it should be. I am not saying we should not celebrate them; they are the giants footprint we have as the people of South Africa.

Wendy was born rich, in an apartheid South Africa where your skin colour was a premium to first class treatment. She could have been happy and looked the other way but she didn't. She did not have to be courageous, compassionate and did not have to use her competence to do anything other than to expand the riches she already had.

However she decided she wants a particular South Africa, Africa and the world like me and you. She did not sit and criticise those that are preventing South Africa she wants unfold and was going to bring about the South Africa she wants.

Wendy took on the lending industry, the predatory lenders and made sure they were brought to book. She has taken a crusade to make sure that the extension of credit to the poor in society is not abused by predatory lenders to drive those people into worst poverty than before.

She found that in the area she lived in, predatory lenders encouraged lenders to borrow money for necessities such as school fees but added other unnecessary items to increase the debt.

Through tackling this, Wendy was going against her class, stepping out of line but she could not just wait and see the misery of her farm workers continue. She had to act and she did.

To me she is one of the heroes amongst us, which is a lesson to me. The other lesson is that let's celebrate the women of 1956 but do two other things; celebrate the heroes amongst us not because they are on television all the time but because they are quietly doing the right thing; and secondly do the right thing.

I am certain that everyone here is a hero among us and in a quiet way fighting injustice, lighting a candle when they see darkness because they are determined to the South Africa we want to live in our own hands. We should remember that by just doing little you can make the difference. You cannot do nothing just because you are not able to do more.

When you defend other people's human dignity, you don't do so because you are selfless, you do so because you are selfish and believe that when there is human suffering among us the best way we can play our part in creating a life that is better for everyone.

My invitation today is to those women who are given power. Power goes with responsibility and the more power you have the more responsibilities you have.

When we say women must be given power we are also indirectly saying women must be given responsibilities.

In reality, every woman finds herself being given responsibility the day they are born, even at a young age. What we are asking for is for women to be given power to match the responsibilities they have.

When coming to power, the idea is not just to add numbers, colour, glamour and class, but it is to make sure that they change the status quo.

As women whether in the banking industry, medical, art or any other, you have to ask yourself, what has changed because you are there.

If you look at women who went to Parliament in 1994, I can vouch for them that they did not just throw class colour to Parliament, they brought change. The laws we talk about today including the Constitution, the Equality Act it was because of women who went there. They are heroes among us.

We remember Dr. Frene Ginwala only as a Speaker of Parliament; but she was more than just the Speaker of Parliament who made sure that firstly, we had the Women's charter.

She and others did not just collect information from women in the country and put it somewhere, when they went to Parliament, they made sure the charter was translated into the Constitution and was there.

These were the women who made sure the country had the Equality Act, the Domestic Violence Act and others.

Let's ask ourselves that after the Frene Ginwala group, what have the women we sent to Parliament done?

Are things different because we have women in Parliament or are things still the same?

I am not in a position to pass judgement because I am part of this new generation. The judgement is yours. As women have we confirmed what Charlotte Maxeke said when she said "women change the society" and ensure that women are empowered, men and children also automatically benefits from social justice.

I know that women are making the difference and their making their mark. I know that the judges have come to say that violence against women to be ended does not just need government to pass laws to prevent, but requires government to take measures to prevent attacks on women in the trains and attacks by people release from the criminal justice prisons.

I can mention a lot of women that are heroes among us and many of them are here with us.

As women today what are we doing to use the power we have been given to make the difference and what is the society doing to recognise the women in our homes, society in respect of support. Let's not just shout the 1956, support the one in your class because in doing that we shall be taking the legacy that was left by Lillian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Raheema Moosa, Sophie De Bruyn and turn it into a force that makes a difference for the people here today.

We would be honouring the memory of people like Albertina Sisulu, Helen Suzman and others who stepped out of the line to say wrong is wrong so that they could ensure we have that inclusive society based on social justice.

We will also be honouring the heroes among us who have been forgotten like Sophie De Bruyn, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Priscilla Jana, Bridgette Mabandla and others who left their homes and fought for freedom.

If we play our part we shall indeed expand the frontiers of freedom, social justice and human dignity and our reward will be a South Africa we want, the Africa we want and the world we want.

Thank you.

Adv. Thuli Madonsela

Public Protector of South Africa