

MEDIA STATEMENT

Tekano: Women's Day presents a time to reflect on South Africa's progress of Gender Equity & Inclusivity.

8th August 2022

ATTENTION: Editors and Reporters

This year democratic South Africa will host the 28th commemoration of women's power and resistance. A democratic South Africa would not have been possible without the contributions of women. At every stage, even when they have been written out of parts of the story, women have written themselves back in, boldly and courageously claiming their space in the birthing process of the nation of our dreams. August 9th, 1956 represents a profound milestone in that journey towards a South Africa that truly belongs to all who live in it.

South Africa's women have remained in the trenches since the defeat of the apartheid regime, pushing their way into the public, private and civic spaces as leaders with or without titles. In government, through their hard work and perseverance, women occupy important positions, influence policy, and shape the direction of our country. In the private sector and despite many challenges, women are pushing the frontiers of corporate accountability insisting on greater representation in and out of the boardroom. In civil society, women lead and have been central in building some of the most important anchor organisations holding government and the private sectors accountable for upholding human rights and for building just futures for all.

Women have been part of conceiving, building, and leading every major social movement and resistance action in democratic South Africa. Who can forget the role that lesbian and queer womxn played as part of the LGBTIAQ movement that ensured the country's constitution upholds the rights of queer people and outlaws discrimination based on gender or sexual identity? Who can forget the role of especially rural women in the country's post 1994 land struggles? Who can forget the womxn of the HIV and AIDS movement who were saving lives long before their struggle contributions ensured our intransigent government conceded to providing life-saving medications? Who can forget the womxn of the One in Nine Campaign who looked patriarchy in the eye and defended the rights of survivors of rape? Who can forget the womxn of the Fallist movement who gave us new language, extended the lenses of justice? Who can forget the womxn of the Total Shutdown and their work that built on decades of activism to end gender-based violence ensuring that our country now has a National plan to address GBV and Femicide? The womxn leading the charge on climate justice and advancing the possibilities for a just, climate friendly transition? Lest we forget the womxn who have been pushing the frontiers of public health to ensure the system puts people first?

"At Tekano, we see you all, and see your hand in every bit of progress our country has made on human rights, justice and equity including health equity. Our country stands today because as womxn you fight everyday not only for your own interests and place in society but for the interests of all", said Siphokazi Mthathi, Tekano Interim Executive Director.

Directors: Chairperson: Assoc. Prof. Tracey Naledi, Prof. Mvuyo Tom, Ms. Joy-Marie Lawrence, Mr. Mila Mafanya,

Ms. Thando Ntoi, Ms. Anne Emmett, Dr. Mzikazi Nduna
Executive Director (Acting): Ms. Siphokazi Mthathi

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This National Women’s Day takes place at an incredibly difficult time for many in South Africa. The country’s economy, already weakened by years of failed leadership, is reeling from pandemic consequences and womxn shoulder the heaviest burden of this. Decades of failed leadership to build a unified health system that caters for all and systematic disinvestment in the public health sector are catching up with South Africa and again, womxn will bear the brunt of unpaid care work as the health system crumbles.

“We acknowledge the progress made on gender inclusion, but only when South Africa stops being a war zone for womxn can we talk of real progress. We must work harder for gender equity and a gender transformative democratic dispensation. It is not only about ensuring progressive legislation, but also in the so-called private or domestic domain, the personal spaces we occupy with friends and families. It starts with changing conversation around us; challenging those, we love for their reductive views and comments such as ‘our women.’ It begins with elevating our vocabulary to be more inclusive and changing our behaviours through our actions” Mthathi continued.

Achieving gender equity is about the “small” and big steps: dismantling the structures and systemic arrangements that uphold patriarchy in society and challenging social norms in every sphere of our lives. By speaking truth to power in every area of our life, we can make greater progress on gender equity.

“Today gender equity has become a buzzword, a kind of fashion item. For womxn, though, it is a matter of life and death. Just a few days before this women’s day, two young girl’s lives were brutally taken in Creighton, KwaZulu Natal. Tekano sends its solidarity to the families and colleagues at Women’s Leadership and Training Programme (WLTP) and stands with them in their demand for #JusticeForAmandaNqoZulu and Minenhle. This women’s day, may these tragedies give us pause when we find ourselves tempted to congratulate ourselves and conveniently speak the single story of progress on gender equity”, said Mthathi.

The prevalence of diseases of inequality such as diabetes, hypertension is alarming among women, yet not surprising when you consider the deep social and economic inequalities and other stress factors most women in South Africa live under. Daily stories of a girl or woman found murdered or raped lays siege on women’s mental state, rubbishing the very idea of freedom that women were marching for in 1956.

May the fire of women’s resistance keep burning. And may we all join the march, using our power everywhere we are to build a nation where gender equity, women’s health and wellbeing are no longer the promise we betray every single day in our private domain and institutions.

ENDS/

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