



ANC TODAY

ONLINE VOICE OF THE AFRICAN NATIONAL CONGRESS

WOMEN'S MONTH | A MESSAGE FROM THE ANC WL

Working together to empower women for development and gender equality



This year we commemorate the 53rd anniversary of the heroic march of 20 000 women to the Union Buildings on the 9th of August 1956. This year's commemoration will take place under the theme "Working together to empower women for development and gender equality".

Every year on this day, as South African women we remember the sacrifice, the commitment, the dedication and the unity in action of the women of the 1950s. They demonstrated that as women, we are strong, powerful, special and valuable.

This day marks the culmination and continuation of the great and heroic struggle of South African women. This is a history that not only demonstrated to the apartheid regime (and our men) that tempering with women could be dangerous, but also demonstrated to women themselves that they could be as hard as rock. As the women called out on the steps of the Union Buildings that day, "Wathint' abafazi, wathint' imbokodo. Strijdom uzakufa" (You touch the women, you touch the rock. Strijdom you will die.)

The 9th of August always gives us an opportunity to critically re-examine the history of the march and the foundations of the women's movement in South Africa, but this day also offers the appropriate occasion to reflect on the current situation of women in the country in relation to progress made since the installation of the first democratic government in 1994. How do we assess our successes and achievements since 1994 and what do we need to do to ensure that we speed up the advancement of women's empowerment and gender equality in South Africa?

The history of the South African women's movement to a very large extent is the history of the ANCWL. It is befitting that as we celebrate 53 years of the Women's march that we do so against the backdrop of the 91 and 61 years of the founding of both the Bantu Women's League and the African National Congress Women's League respectively. As members of the League this day reminds us of the glorious past of this great organization we are privileged to be members of.

Lillian Ngoyi who led the representatives of the 20 000 women together with Rahima Moosa, Sophie Williams and Helen Joseph to the office of Prime Minister Strijdom later recalled how she saw her own daughter cry as she led the delegation away, and how she thought that it would probably be the last time they saw each other. When Lillian knocked and a voice from behind the door shouted that she was not allowed to be there she responded as follows, "The women of Africa are outside. They built this place and their husbands died for this."

WEEK IN REVIEW

President Zuma nominates the new Chief Justice | President Jacob Zuma nominated Justice Sandile Ngcobo, a graduate of the Universities of Zululand, Natal, Georgetown Law Centre and Harvard with a distinguished legal career, as the next Chief Justice. President Zuma has requested advice from the Judicial Services Commission and leaders of political parties represented in the National Assembly in this regard.

South Africans unite in response to challenges of global economic crisis | Government, labour, community and business working together to alleviate the impact of global economic crises, the government dedicated R2.4 billion to be placed in a National Jobs Fund to finance a training layoff scheme as one alternative to retrenchment for workers and companies affected by the recession. This will be launched in September.

President Zuma visits Balfour | President Jacob Zuma visited Siyethemba Township in Balfour to gain real understanding of the anger and frustration of the township community. Seeing that they have no school and clinic and also lack many other services, including identity documents he directed the relevant Ministers to prioritise the affected areas.

Cancer robs ANC of a committed stalwart | Comrade Victor Moche, who served the ANC in various capacities with distinction passed away due to cancer. The ANC has lost a committed, patriotic, quiet and confident cadre who never failed in whatever area he was deployed to. The ANC will remember this gallant fighter for freedom and democracy in South Africa.

Helen Joseph told the story from here: "When it was over women walked back to the bus terminus in two's and three's, singing now, never forming a procession, babies on backs, and baskets on heads. They reached the buses as African men queued after work for their transport home, but when they saw the women coming, in their green blouses and skirts, they stood back. "Let the women go first. It was a great tribute from weary men," they said.

It is also important to contextualize the Women's March of 1956 within the historical development of the women's movement in South Africa. It is worthwhile to note that the women's anti-pass march of 1913 in Bloemfontein stands out as the beginnings of the women's movement in South Africa with the formation of formation of the Bantu Women's League in 1918, led by Charlotte Maxeke.

It is also worth noting that in those days women were only granted auxiliary status by the ANC and had no voting rights in the organization. It was only in 1943 that women were eventually allowed to become full members of the ANC and the Bantu Women's League became the ANCWL.

Year after year as we celebrate the National Women's day we can pride ourselves and say indeed we stand on the shoulders of those brave heroines who have gone before us. Through years of consistent organizing and mobilization, women struggles had come of age politically and could no longer be ignored. The commemorations of this day continues to remind us of women's resilience and our amazing spirit of struggle and remind us of the high price that was exacted from those who went before us to create the environment we live and work in today.

On this day we need to constantly ask ourselves how far are we in achieving the non-sexist society that Lilian Ngoyi, Charlotte Maxeke, Ida Mtwana, Helen Joseph and others were fighting for?

In assessing what has been achieved since, it is encouraging to note the tremendous improvements in the lives of South African women especially space they now have in ensuring that they continue to deepen the struggles for their emancipation. Notable are those South African women can make the following claims;

Have made great advancement in the areas of political representation and decision making at all levels of society. South Africa currently has more that 40% women's representation in the executive (cabinet) and 41% in the legislature. South Africa also has 29% of women in top management positions in the private sector, and although this means that we still have a long way to go, this is above the international average of 22%.

- Access to resources like clean water, sanitation and electricity has been improved for especially poor and rural women;
- Access to education and health has been greatly improved with gender parity achieved in South African education.
- Special measures have been taken to ensure that rural women have increased access to public health care and clinics. Health care services are also aimed at reducing maternal mortality as well as providing women greater access to reproductive health-care services throughout the country.
- Different measures have been taken to empower women through a progressive constitution and the enactment of gender sensitive legislation as well as engendered policies.
- Most exciting for South African women is the establishment of the Ministry of Women, Children and People with Disabilities by President Zuma consolidating our programme to continue the progarmme of empowering and developing women

EVENTS IN HISTORY

7 August 2004; The New National Party (NNP) announced its dissolution and merger with the African National Congress. It encouraged its individual members to join ANC branches in their respective localities. F.W. de Klerk relinquished his NNP membership, saying the party has gone too far in merging with the ANC.

9 August 1956; 20 000 of all races marched to the Union Buildings, to hand over a petition against the Urban Areas Act which tighten control of the movement of African women in urban areas by making the carrying of passes compulsory.

11 August 1982; the apartheid released details of a South African Defence Force (SADF) raid into Southern Angola. Between two and three hundred South West African People's Organisation (SWAPO) fighters were killed and an upwards of another hundred injured at a forward base in the Cambeno Valley.

12 August 1946; About 60 000 miners went on a week long strike by African mineworkers, led by John Beaver (JB) Marks. The apartheid government suppressed the strike by force. According to official figures, nine miners were killed and 1 248 injured. Fifty-one people were later charged in connection with the strike.

13 August 1967; Umkhonto we Sizwe's (MK) Luthuli Detachment and Zimbabwean African People's Union (ZAPU) guerrillas engaged Rhodesian forces in the Wankie Game Reserve, near the border of Zambia and Botswana. The operation was meant to give added military impetus to both the ANC and ZAPU's broad strategies for liberation.

It is important to note again that despite many areas of success that have been registered, there are many others that continue to negatively affect women;

■ Violence against women particularly domestic violence and child abuse continue to be one of the major issues that confront the liberation of women in our country. We are hopeful that the new coordinating and management structure for the criminal justice system will heighten interventions that will protect women and children from all forms of abuse. The re-establishment of Sexual Offences and Child Protection units of the SAPS will also reinforce efforts to prevent and respond to crimes against women and children.

■ The feminisation of poverty, underdevelopment and unemployment: Much has been achieved, but women continue to bear the brunt of poverty and deprivation. Our Expanded Public Works Programme II is set to increase the number of women beneficiaries and I am optimistic that we shall improve the condition of many women and their families through this intervention.

■ Objectification of women in society especially in and by the media in particular, continues to be a major challenge.

■ Casualisation of women workers where business relegates women to casual work and renders them vulnerable to retrenchments, outsourcing and casualisation. Hundreds of thousands of women are exploited in sweatshops or are in casualised insecurity. The impact of this has been devastating on the lives of millions of South Africans, particularly working class blacks and women,

■ Now with the current global financial crisis women because they are still relegated to the entry level of the economy, participating in the informal sector, and in the main do not own the means of production they are at the greatest risk and are highly vulnerable.

■ Women continue to be dogged by patriarchal and all its negative effects.

So much has been done, and much remains for us to do. How do we then proceed to ensure that we address the challenges that remain? I think the following key objectives must drive our progressive agenda going forward:

■ Work in partnership with women in all sectors for social transformation;

■ Pay particular attention to the development of young women and to encourage their inclusion on all progressive structures;

■ Take the struggles of women to higher levels and consolidate the gains already achieved in pursuit of the establishment of a truly democratic, non-racial, non-sexist and prosperous South Africa;

■ Strengthen existing progressive Women's Organisations and the role and responsibilities of women in all national progressive organizations and seek common areas of action amongst progressive women's organisations

■ Continue to fight for gender equality, and strengthen the gender machinery within government, the legislatures and civil society;

■ Ensure that commitments made by our government on the rights of women are implemented;

■ Deal with the concrete concerns of women and grounded in the aspirations of women in general and the working class women in particular;

■ Pay special attention to the developmental needs of the most vulnerable women in society in general and rural women in particular;

■ Support women affected and infected by HIV and AIDS;

■ Document the history and work of women;

The Women's Day allows us as women to take stock of where we are and how far we have come. But it is also a time to recommit ourselves to the important task that lies ahead. As former President Nelson Mandela reminded us, "Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression".

LATEST STATEMENTS

ANC statement on the appointment of the new Chief Justice, 6 August 2009

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2009/pr0806.html>

ANC NWC Media Statement, 4 August 2009

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2009/pr0804.html>

ANC statement on the death of Comrade Victor Moche, 3 August 2009

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2009/pr0803.html>

ANC Statement on the Municipal Wage Agreement, 31 July 2009

<http://www.anc.org.za/show.php?doc=ancdocs/pr/2009/pr0731.html>

We must also remind ourselves of the statement made by Charlotte Maxeke, at the Second Conference of the National Council of African Women on 8 December 1938 when she referred to the importance of our commitment to this struggle for the emancipation of women; this is what she said,

“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. Do away with that fearful animal of jealousy, kill that spirit, and love one another as brothers and sisters.”

Aluta continua!
Igama lamakhosikazi malibongwe!

VIEW POINT | BY BLADE NZIMANDE

Use Women’s Moonth to intensify the struggle against patriarchy and all forms of chauvinism



This last weekend the SACP celebrated its 88th anniversary of a principled struggle for national liberation and socialism. In our anniversary statement the SACP, amongst other things, reminded the workers and the poor of our country, and indeed all South Africans, about the contribution of the SACP in the struggle against racism and all other forms of oppression and exploitation. In our anniversary statement we, amongst other things, said

"It was Communists in SA, guided initially by our core Marxist principle of internationalist solidarity, who pioneered the traditions of non-racialism which are now a cornerstone of our new democracy... from its earliest years, the Communist Party of South Africa (CPSA) actively practised non-racial policies AND non-racial membership. Indeed, for many decades the Communist Party was the ONLY political party in SA that was non-racial in its membership.

"From the earliest years, South African communists also clearly understood that principled non-racialism was not just a question of "liberal" rhetoric about equality - genuine non-racialism in South African conditions required active affirmative action measures - including the consolidation of a black leadership cadre and the empowerment of racially oppressed workers and peasants. These active de-racialisation measures included".

The theory and practice of South Africa's national democratic and socialist revolution

We made this statement in the wake of a (partial, if not tired) resuscitation of an otherwise important debate in the media between Andile Mgxatana and Devan Pillay, on whether it is race or class that is the primary contradiction and main form of social stratification in contemporary South African society. Predictably, Mgxatana argues that race, to the total exclusion of class, is the primary social and political fault-line in South African society today. In his reply Pillay conflates race and class, by projecting them as of equal importance. Both Mgxatana and Pillay are wrong!

Mgxatana consistently approaches the very important issue of the national question in South Africa purely from the standpoint of race - a reflection of the consistent failure by South Africa's black consciousness movement to understand the totality of, and inter-relationship amongst, the main social contradictions in South African society, both in the past and present. Pillay, in a rather defensive manner, essentially argues that class is as equally important as race in understanding South African society today.

LATEST SPEECHES

Address by President Jacob Zuma to the National Press Club, 6 August 2009

<http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/show.asp?include=president/pr/2009/pr08061419.htm&ID=1724&type=pr>

Statement by President Jacob Zuma following briefing on framework response to the economic crisis, 5 August 2009

<http://www.thepresidency.gov.za/show.asp?include=president/pr/2009/pr08051652.htm&ID=1722&type=pr>

The SACP has for decades now advanced a proper understanding of race and class in South Africa - a perspective that not only remains relevant, but is the only correct way of understanding the totality of social contradictions and challenges facing South African society today. For the SACP it is not whether race or class is the primary contradiction, but it is by understanding the deep interrelationship between these two contradictions that best reveals the social contradictions and political challenges facing South African society.

The SACP has correctly understood that our task is to properly grasp both the class content of race and racism, and the racial (or national) content of the class struggle in South Africa. At the same time, much as the SACP has understood the deep interrelationship between these two contradictions in South African society, the two are not identical. The racial contradiction has been (and still is) the primary (most immediate) contradiction in South Africa, whilst the class contradiction represents the fundamental (determinant) contradiction. It is on the terrain of class analysis that the racial contradiction in South Africa is best understood.

The above understanding and approach to the principal contradictions of South African society did not emerge from an a priori theoretical analysis of the South African revolution, but came through practical and concrete struggles for national liberation and socialism in South African conditions. It has also been the decades of mutual influences between the SACP and the ANC - through concrete struggles against national oppression and class exploitation - that has further enriched our understanding of the South African revolution. In fact it can be argued that without the influence of the SACP's principled non-racial and class perspectives, the ANC could have gone the Pan Africanist Congress (PAC) route of a doomed narrow and chauvinistic African nationalism or racial one-sidedness of the black consciousness movement, which have led to the political decimation of both these movements.

Similarly, without the influence of the ANC's progressive nationalist perspectives, the SACP could have easily gone the route of narrow, (race-reductionistic) class struggles similar to those organizations like the Non-European Unity Movement (NEUM) and its contemporary variants, the small and ineffectual ultra-left, highly sectarian movements.

The SACP's approach to women's emancipation and gender equality

We have sought to reflect on the above issues, primarily as an entry point to understand the critical challenges facing the struggle for women's emancipation and gender equality, as we once more, celebrate August as South Africa's women's month.

With the mass struggles of the 1970s and 80s, especially the growth of a working-class women's movement at the time, the SACP's perspectives and struggles began to broaden to concretely incorporate gender inequality as the third key contradiction in South African society. The SACP, and indeed our entire liberation movement, has come to understand the national democratic revolution as the struggle to address and overcome the national, class and gender contradictions in their inter-relationship.

The above means that the struggle for women's emancipation cannot be understood outside of its relationship to the national and class struggles. A one-sided emphasis on gender without understanding the national content (whose principal feature is primarily, but not exclusively, race) of these gender struggles is bound to lose sight of the vast differences and opportunities between black and white women.

Similarly an exclusive focus on gender at the expense of its class content is likely to privilege the interests of elite black women at the direct expense, if not on the back of, poor working class black women. In other words, whilst the struggle for gender equality seeks to liberate all women from the yoke of patriarchal oppression, we must not lose sight of the racial and class stratification amongst women themselves. This means that we need to constantly build the capacity of African working class women as part of the leading motive forces in the struggle for the emancipation of women as a whole.

Incidentally, yet very important, it is absolutely essential that as we fight for women's emancipation and against all forms of patriarchy, we must also fight against all forms of chauvinism, including African chauvinism and narrow African nationalism. This struggle must be waged both within the progressive women's movement, within our own broader liberation movement and in South African society as a whole.

UPCOMING EVENTS

President Jacob Zuma will on, deliver a keynote address at the National Women's Day celebrations

Sunday, 09 August 2009
Bhekuzulu Sports Grounds,
Vryheid
11h00.

It is also important to understand that the relationship between these three contradictions is not static, but changes in different historical periods. Post 1994, whilst there has been a slight narrowing of class differentiation between blacks and whites, there has been a widening of the class gulf within the black communities. There also has been a widening class gap amongst black women, brought about by the simultaneous advancement of black women into senior positions AND the impact of retrenchments and casualisation amongst black working class women.

Communist women to the front: Concrete women's struggles under concrete conditions

The SACP's specific contribution to this year's women's month and beyond must be guided by our current struggles to mitigate the impact of the current global capitalist economic crisis, as black working class women constitute the most vulnerable layer of South African society. It is black working class women who are first to be retrenched, casualised and outsourced as the recession bites.

Through our red forums that are currently underway, it is of utmost importance that the struggles of black working class women are placed at the fore, and to ensure that we deepen black working class women organization as the primary platform for waging the struggle for women's emancipation and gender equality.

The tasks of the SACP therefore is to ensure that all our cadres, especially women communist cadres, need to continue to play a prominent and leading role in current women's struggles, as the only guarantor that the interests of black working class women are at the forefront of consolidating and deepening the struggle against patriarchy.

A key challenge is that of organising women where they are, around the daily things that they do, as casualised labour, as domestic workers, as members of school governing bodies, as church-goers, etc. This requires the strengthening of old platforms of struggle as well as new ones. The SACP also needs to build on the advances made by the YCL the majority of whose membership is young black women.

The SACP also has to intensify its engagement with the government's gender machinery, especially the task of its revitalisation with the establishment of new Women's Ministry. This year's women's month come in the wake of a serious meltdown of the Commission for Gender Equality, and the proposal to merge it with the Human Rights Commission. This requires an active engagement with such incorporation in order to ensure that gender issues are simply not buried in a larger commission. At the same time the SACP must actively engage with the emerging perspectives, programmes and priorities from the Women's Ministry.

It is for the above reason that the SACP's Politbureau has tasked the Central Committee's Gender and Social Transformation Commission to urgently engage with the challenges, new realities and opportunities provided by the establishment of a women's ministry.

Asikhulume!!!

>>Blade Nzimande is an ANC NEC member and General Secretary of the South African Communist. This article was first published in the SACP Journal - Umsebenzi Online Volume 8, No. 13, 6 August 2009