GERTRUDE SHOPE ANNUAL DIALOGUE FORUM ON CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND PEACE-MAKING –

LOCALISING UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325

Minister of International Relations and Cooperation, Dr. Naledi Pandor

Minister in the Presidency Responsible for Women, Youth and People with Disabilities, Ms. Maite Nkoana Mashabane

Our Special Guest of Honour Mme Gertrude Shope

United Nations Executive Director for UN Women Ms Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka

Director General DIRCO, Mr Mahoai

UN Women Representative Ms. Anne Githuku-Shongwe

African Union Special Envoy Madam Benita Diop
Charges’d’Affaires of Norway to South Africa, Mr Paal Bjornestad

Grandands of the Course on Capacity Building for South African Women on Conflict Resolution and Mediation

Colleagues, Comrades and Friends

It is heartening and an honour to be here during this occasion when we host the fifth instalment of the Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum. It comes at the right time! Just in the past week, on the 31st July 2019, we celebrated the 57th Anniversary of the Pan African Women’s Organisation (PAWO) at the same venue. Most importantly, we have at last held the validation meeting on the implementation framework on Women, Peace and Security, the WPS agenda in South Africa on Friday 2nd August 2019. On all accounts, we had a highly successful session with over two hundred delegates in attendance drawn from civil society, academia and government. We were also honored with the presence of veteran women activists from our country and beyond.

For today, what better person and occasion to be at after we have had these two events, than Mme Gertrude Shope, and in our midst Cabinet colleagues? MaShope, as we fondly call her, was Member of Parliament in the 1st Parliament under President Nelson Mandela. She represents the aspirations that have been spelt out in the women, peace and security agenda, and in fact even the preceding milestones that were achieved, in particular the following: the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action, whose 25th anniversary we shall observe in 2020; later the United Nations Security Council Resolution
which will also be twenty years in 2020 since adoption; the African Union resolution and road map to silence the guns by 2020. Therefore between now and when we have the UN General Assembly and still in the UN Security Council, we shall have been part of these milestones. Most importantly, we will also be at the helm as the African Union chair.

This annual forum also occurs at a time when we have ascended membership of the UN Security Council and are in the chair during the month of October 2019. It will be a good highlight in the period during our tenure.

These afore-mentioned milestones would not have been possible without stalwarts and leaders such as Mme Shope and many other women leaders. Thus when the invitation came through I did not even hesitate to honour it. It brought home the sense of humility, coupled with honour and privilege. Under the tutelage of Mme Shope, in those many years away from home, women in general within our movement the African National Congress and in particular uMkhonto we Sizwe, drew succor in the knowledge that she was and has always been there to provide mentorship, leadership and guidance, all in the most difficult of circumstances.

In honoring MaShope as we do today, we also recognize the sterling contribution and role of women in various sites of the struggle for liberation. As a living legend, we are inspired by the example set by the countless heroines of our struggle and with most of whom she lived side by side, in the years preceding exile from the early 1960s, right through until our return home from the early 1990s. MaShope walked with, and worked with, to mention but a few, Sophie de Bruyn, Ruth Mompati, Mittah Seperepere, Regina Nzo, Rita Ndzanga, Bertha Gxowa, Lilian Ngoyi, Albertinah Sisulu, Helen Joseph, Ruth First, Ida Mntwana, Florence Mophosho, Ray
Alexander, Francis Baard, Dora Tamana, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, Ama Naidoo, Fatima Meer, Dorothy Nyembe, Gretha Ncapayi and many, many others who constitute a roll call of honour, which we must have. The courage, determination and heroism of the many women we have mentioned and countless other unsung heroines, as well as the central role played by the masses of the women of our country in the struggle for liberation galvanized all sectors of society.

It was thus no mistake that the newly elected democratic Parliament and Government in 1994 placed the critical matter of the emancipation and empowerment of women at the centre stage of the democratic order. It is because of the courage, determination, heroism and wisdom that MaShope drove us to work to the best of our ability to ensure the full emancipation of women in all areas of society.

I must take this opportunity to render profound gratitude to Minister Maite Nkoana-Mashabane, both for the foresight of this programme of dialogue and conflict resolution in our continent, and most importantly and fitting, for naming it in honour of this resilient stalwart Mme Shope and launching the first annual dialogue back in August 2015! I am honoured to have been the keynote speaker back then.

In honoring MaShope today, we must do so with an assessment of where we have come from not only since the launch of the Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum, but also as a country now celebrating twenty five years of her freedom and independence. It has been a long road, and more still needs to be done. We need to ensure that the programme is well resourced to enable us to achieve the goals we have set in our National Action Plan, which we shall in the near future table for the world to see. In addition, we shall do
so cognisant of the partnerships and support we have been able to receive for these programmes. In particular, I wish to thank the support that the government of Norway has contributed to the training programme falling under this banner of the Dialogue Forum. The Nordic Women Mediators’ Network has also been instrumental, especially under the thematic debate on “Women and Mediation: Experiences in Ensuring Wider Participation of Women in Peace Processes” during May 2016. These included Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. We also participated in this event. Having noted the low level of women participation in peace processes, our outcry still remains that “it is not about counting women. It is about making women count”!

I say so also mindful of the support that the United Nations, African Union and SADC has illustrated support for this programme. As we have the 5th Annual Dialogue, I am happy that the training programme for Capacity Building on Conflict Resolution, Mediation and Negotiations will see thirty five graduands by the end of our three day dialogue, twenty five of whom are leaders from civil society organizations and ten from various government departments, including our Department of Defence, who are no strangers to what MaShope stood for and will rededicate their efforts in fulfilment thereof. I do hope that we can be able to increase the intake of the programme, and also garner more funding from it even as we experiencing fiscal constraints across government. The graduands from this programme, and those that went before, must be inspired that the programme they have been through under Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum, could not have been more fitting. This is because MaShope had in her early years an association with
education, as a teacher herself, having started in 1948 at the time the then Nationalist Party ascended power.

In 1953 the apartheid government introduced Bantu Education. With this action by the regime, she stood firm in her conviction, and resigned from teaching as part of the nationwide campaign against Bantu Education. She became immersed in the struggles for women emancipation including the adoption of the Women's Charter in 1954, a year before the Freedom Charter in 1955.

As we celebrate Women’s Month, we must also honour her, for it is her month too, having been born a week from today, on the 15th August 1925. We must make an applause to her, for having been with us all this time, leading us, guiding us, and still being committed to the course. Thus as we observe national Women’s Day this Friday 09th August 2019, we must remember that she too, was one of the women leaders at the time, leading to the historic march on the Union Buildings against the imposition of pass laws on women, and of course against the entire system of apartheid. This was a week before her 31st birthday even back then.

We must all be happy that MaShope lived through and saw the eventual fall of the apartheid regime, having lived through the most repressive period with the ascendance of the Nationalist Party from 1948. They wasted no time in introducing draconian laws for the further suppression of Blacks in general and Africans in particular. From 1949 they introduced the Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act; in 1950 the Prevention of Immorality Act; the Population Registration Act of 1950; the Group Areas Act forcing physical separation between the races in terms of residential areas, resulting in forced removals such as the Sophiatown and District 6 in Cape Town. As if this was
not enough, there was also the Suppression of Communism Act of 1950, thus outlawing the Communist Party of South Africa. This piece of legislation made it illegal for communists and anyone with radical views for change to be arrested, banished and or even denied employment. Many other pieces of legislation were passed in that period. All these must give us the perspective and climate in which Ma Shope lived under until ultimately leaving the country for exile, thus joining her peers such as Ruth Mompati and many others mentioned earlier. Even in this difficult period, she learned patience and resilience.

Most of us who were shaped under her tutelage can attest to these qualities, as a mother to many of us young women swelling the ranks of uMkhonto we Sizwe. She will tell you of her experience in the leadership, having to intervene to ensure treatment of young soldiers in the MK camps, and that women combatants I particular got their most basic of necessities. MaShope continues to be a pioneer of women leadership in our country, long before the current democratic dispensation. We are indebted by your service to your people. You have been a formidable leader and as President of the then ANC Women’s Section, oversaw the transition into the Women’s League and handed over the reins.

As we celebrate Women’s Month on Friday National Women’s Day, it is fitting that we must all rise, to honour you for your birthday in the next week the 15th August 2019. We must also rise to honour the inspiration you have given us over the years, and wish you continued good health, strength and wisdom.
As I conclude, I want to wish all of us! Happy Women’s Day!

Happy Women’s Month!

Wa thint’a abafazi

Wa thint’imbokodo

I thank you.