



EFF STATEMENT ON THE 1956 WOMEN'S MARCH COMMEMORATION

Friday, 09 August 2024.

The EFF commemorates sixty-eight (68) years since the fierce and fearless 1956 Women's March against the dehumanising apartheid pass laws. It is a day forever etched in the memory of the nation as a signifier of the fierce and indefatigable liberatory spirit of the women of our country.

The racist apartheid regime enacted laws that sought to cement the dispossession of African people of not only their land, but their humanity as well. The pass laws gave the white regime powers to validate or invalidate the presence of African people in areas outside of the designated native reserves.

Then in 1956, women like Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Rahima Moosa, Albertina Sisulu, and Sophia Williams-De Bruyn, decided that they could no longer be pariahs in the land of their own birth, and led 20,000 women to the Union Buildings in Tshwane, their voices united in the defiant cry of "Wathint' Abafazi, Wathint' Imbokodo!" (You strike a woman, you strike a rock).

In remembering women in history, we must also remember that Mama Winnie Madikizela-Mandela stands out as a beacon of resistance. Despite relentless persecution by the apartheid state, including imprisonment, banishment, and constant surveillance, Mama Winnie remained devoted to her commitment to the liberation of black people. She became a symbol of defiance, organising the masses, mobilising women, and providing refuge to activists who were hunted by the regime.

Her work in keeping the spirit of resistance alive in the townships during the darkest days of apartheid cannot be overstated. Mama Winnie was not just the "Mother of the

Nation"; she was the embodiment of the struggle itself, a warrior who fought tirelessly against a brutal system designed to crush the human spirit.

However, 30 years into our democracy, the state of women in South Africa remains a glaring indictment of our society. The promises of freedom and equality have not been realised for the majority of women in this country. Women continue to bear the brunt of the systemic inequalities that define our society.

Women are more likely to be unemployed, and when they do find work, it is often in precarious, low-paying jobs that offer no security. The burden of care work, which remains largely invisible and unpaid, falls disproportionately on the shoulders of women, trapping them in cycles of poverty and dependence.

In 2024, young women faced significantly greater challenges in the labour market compared to their male counterparts. While the absorption rate for young men (15-34 years) was 31.9%, it lagged considerably for young women at just 24.2%. The unemployment rate for young women was alarmingly high, reaching 49.4%, when the average for the country stands at 32.9%, and the average for the youth is at 45.5% highlighting their heightened vulnerability in an already precarious economic landscape.

It is made abundantly clear that the patriarchal structure deeply ingrained in our society often earmarks girls for labour from a young age, hindering their ability to complete primary and tertiary education. Family commitments, such as caring for children or elderly relatives, frequently prevent girls from attending or finishing school, perpetuating cycles of inequality. Furthermore, the prevalence of female-headed households, often larger and extended, places additional caregiving responsibilities on women, who are compelled to care for multiple family members concurrently.

The violence against women, perpetuated by men who see them as objects to be owned and controlled, is a daily reality. Women are fighting this violence alone, with little to no support from a justice system that consistently fails them. The high rates of assault and murder of women are a national crisis, yet the response from those in power remains woefully inadequate.

Young girls, too, are under siege. They face predators in their schools and communities, with no safe space to turn to. The consistently escalating high rates of girl children falling pregnant by adult men, and the rising HIV infection rates among young girls are symptoms of a society that does not value its young women.

In the period between 2023 and 2024, over 2,700 girls aged between 10 and 14 gave birth at public healthcare facilities, along with 120,000 girls between the ages of 15 and 19. Instead of being nurtured and protected, they are exploited and discarded, and the former liberation party proves to us time and time again that they despise the girl children of this country.

Sex workers, who are among the most vulnerable women in our society, continue to live in fear and danger. Despite our calls for the decriminalisation of sex work, these women are still criminalised, denied the basic protections of the law, and left to fend for themselves in an environment of violence and exploitation.

The crisis in women's health is laid bare by the alarming rate of maternal deaths during childbirth, a devastating issue that demands urgent action. Despite some progress, the maternal mortality ratio (MMR) remains disturbingly high, with a rise to 88 per 100,000 in 2020. This stagnation in improvement is a damning indictment of the system's failure to prioritise women's lives. The situation is even more dire in regions like the Northern Cape and Eastern Cape, where the MMR has increased, underscoring the critical need for immediate and radical intervention to address these deadly inequalities.

Thomas Sankara once said, "The revolution and women's liberation go together. We do not talk of women's emancipation as an act of charity or out of a surge of human compassion. It is a basic necessity for the revolution to triumph." The continued oppression of women in South Africa is a sign that our revolution is incomplete. As long as women are not free, our society is not free.

The Economic Freedom Fighters (EFF) stands resolute in the fight alongside the women of South Africa, not merely in rhetoric but through radical action, to demand

the long-overdue realisation of true freedom and equality. We have been relentless in confronting gender-based violence through our GBV desk, leading the charge for the decriminalisation of sex work, and enforcing gender parity within our own ranks, ensuring women hold equal power.

Our commitment on the opposition benches to dismantle the oppressive structures that continue to subjugate women in this country and to ignite the flames of true liberation for all remains firm. In our own ranks, in each of our organisational structures, we have a firm 50-50 split between women and men. Our public representatives in Parliament and in provincial legislatures, councils, and government are more than 50% women.

The EFF wishes the women of South Africa economic freedom in their lifetime and we will continue this struggle until it is realised.

ISSUED BY THE ECONOMIC FREEDOM FIGHTERS

Leigh-Ann Mathys (National Spokesperson) 082 304 7572

Thato Lebyane (Media Inquiries) 078 563 1581

 communications@effonline.org
 <http://www.effonline.org>

 @EFFSouthAfrica
 @EFFSouthAfrica

 Economic Freedom Fighters
 @EFFSouthAfrica