

MEDIA RELEASE	Women's Month: PSA calls for united constructive efforts
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August is a significant month for South Africa during which the contribution of women in the quest for freedom is commemorated.

On 9 August 1956, some 20 000 women marched to the Union Buildings in protest against oppressive pass laws, refusing to be stopped in their pursuit for justice. They refused to conform with the *status quo* and fought for freedom in the face of a repressive government. This occasion brought the plight of African women to a sharp focus. During this march, the slogan “*Now you have touched the women, you have struck a rock,*” gained currency.

South Africans are indebted to these acts of courage and bravery for the freedom enjoyed today. The struggle of South African women, apart from a quest for freedom, included multiple oppression, including patriarchy, sexism, and gender-based violence. In 2024, 68 years later, South African women are, however, still face patriarchy and domestic and gender-based violence. Women's Month therefore serves as a historic reminder and draws attention to the continued struggles faced by women.

August is also important in the history of South African labour relations, marking the fateful day when 34 mine workers were massacred in Marikana whilst protesting for decent pay. Like the women of 1956, these workers were not intimidated as they laid their lives in a quest for decent pay. The Marikana tragedy is a blot on democracy and an indictment of failures to address and halt socio-economic inequalities.

The PSA, as a major Union in the public sector, will continue efforts in support of gender equality, equal pay, social justice, and women empowerment in the public sector. Whilst the emancipation of women must begin with dislodging patriarchy, true emancipation and empowerment of women must be realised at the workplace - the public service must lead by example. Women play a vital role in the South African public service, contributing significantly to the country's development and transformation.

Despite historical gender disparities, women have made strides in driving change in society. In the new democratic dispensation, the upliftment of women to position of leadership in politics and government has been witnessed. However, much is still to be done. Women bear the brunt of unemployment, with an unemployment figure of 35.7%, which is higher than the national average. Underrepresentation in senior positions in the workplace remain evident, with the Department of Employment and Labour reporting in 2023 that a mere 26.5% of women occupied top-management positions in South Africa. Wage disparities based on gender persist, especially in the private sector. South African women earn 78 cents for every R1 earned by male counterparts performing similar jobs.

The struggle is clearly not over. In honouring the legacy of the 1956 women, Nelson Mandela, and the Marikana workers, the PSA appeals to South Africans to volunteer time and skills to make a positive impact, pursuing the rights and dignity of all workers and citizens, and striving for excellence in all work to build a better South Africa.

Together, we can create a brighter future for all. Let us make every day count in efforts to advance the plight of workers in general and women in particular.

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