

Keynote Address by the Deputy Minister of Social Development, Mr Ganief Hendricks, during Commemoration of World Population Day at Mmabatho Palms Hotel in Mahikeng, North West Province

Programme Director; Ms Manogrie Golden;
Executive Mayor of Mahikeng Local Municipality, Councillor Tshepiso Mphehlo;
District Mayor of Ngaka Modiri Molema Municipality, Councillor Khumalo Molefe;
North West MEC of Social Development; Ms Sussana Dantjie;
UNFPA Country Representative, in South Africa, Mr Yu Yu;
University of North-West Vice Chancellor, Professor Bismark Tyobeka;
North-West University, Head of the Department for Demography and Population Studies, Dr. Mluleki Tsawe;
Population Experts, Researchers and Academics;
Distinguished guests;
Ladies and gentlemen;

It is an honour and privilege to address this important occasion which is about reflecting on the state of our population as we commemorate World Population Day under the theme: “Embracing the Power of Inclusive Data Towards a Resilient and Equitable Future for All”.

This day is traditionally observed on 11 July, each year, but you would be aware that some of the changes were informed by this year’s national elections and the transition from the Sixth to the Seventh Administration of the Government of National Unity which is in full swing.

Our theme, which informs the direction of today’s deliberations, is a reflection of the outcome of both global and regional reviews and evaluations of progress and achievements accomplished over the last three decades of the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action; a decade of the Addis Ababa Declaration on Population and Development; and almost two-decades of the Sustainable Development Goals.

According to the findings of these reports, lack of data or information and sufficient evidence to explain situations, track implementation, measure achievements, assess progress and identify improvements as well as the benefits related to people's well-being or general socio-economic transformation has been identified as a challenge particularly in the African continent and here at home, in South Africa.

The 2024 World Population Day theme also ponders on the golden rule of the Sustainable Development Goals agenda, including, our own National Development Plan Vision 2030 with the promise to leave no one behind. To realise this promise, there is a need for a timely, credible, reliable, verifiable, comprehensive, well-disaggregated, and geo-referenced data. This will help us to gain a better understanding of who the people that make up the numbers are, where they are residing, what circumstances they are in, what their ages and needs are. That is where data generating institutions and researchers become more important in diverse sourcing, collection and capturing data.

Programme Director

Making data available to decision-makers, planners, civil society organizations, businesses and citizens helps to shape policies, direct actions, advise on development options, and permit governments to be held to accountable, in a way that truly reflects the population needs. Inclusive data means that the data we collected or intend to collect should give account of all people and groups, regardless of their age, gender, ethnicity, and location.

This year's commemoration therefore offers an opportunity to all of us to pause and ask ourselves as data producers and users whether during data collection on census, surveys and registration of civil events, the Right Questions are asked. Questions such as: It is our data collection safe for all people? Who is still going uncounted?

The assessment of South Africa's data generation and management systems in light of the World Population Day theme this year, South Africa has in the past thirty years of freedom and democracy, as well as the 25 years of the existence of the South African Population Policy conducted in four Censuses of 1996, 2001, 2011 and 2022,

and many other surveys, respectively. Through these Censuses and Surveys, we can draw a picture on the progress this country has made and the remaining challenges since 1994.

We have also been able to use data and information from these sources to identify our nation's needs, achievements; and to monitor and evaluate the efficiency and outcomes of government policies and programmes. To this end, understanding and managing the data ecosystem is important for the country to harness the full potential of data, make informed decisions, and adapt to evolving sectors and business landscapes. Through Statistics South Africa, government has been able to make statistical information available at all levels of society, including, Business, Government, Academia, Parliament, Civil Society, Schools, and the Public at large. This statistical information assists millions of users globally who can access our numbers and narratives online.

Distinguished guests

The 25th review of the implementation of the South African Population Policy and the 30th review of the implementation of the International Conference on Population and Development Programme of Action reveals an increase in the country's population growth rate. The biggest population growth rates were observed between the years 2011 and 2022 at a projected 1.8 percent.

Similar to other developing countries, South Africa has a relatively youthful population. However, the country is undergoing an age transition from a young population to an ageing population. On the other hand, the child population, comprised of children under 15 years continues to decline. The population of older persons significantly increased from 2,8 million in 1996 to 6,1 million in 2022.

Across the globe, a vast number of countries are experiencing a steady growth in the number and proportion of older persons. This 'mega trend' of population ageing is likely to become one of the most pivotal social transformations of this century. Worldwide acknowledgment of the contribution and wisdom of older persons as well as the steadfast intent to uphold the dignity and needs of older persons is captured in

the annual commemoration of the International Day of Older Persons, which takes place today.

In support of older persons, South Africa also pays tribute to its senior citizens to highlight the myriad issues that affect their lives and importantly, reaffirm efforts to ensure their wellbeing. The Population Policy for South Africa further acknowledges older persons as an important component of the population. Such commitment to older persons is particularly significant given the current and future demographic implications of an ageing population.

The rise in the number of elderly persons has implications for planning and policy formulation, especially about the health and social safety nets that need to be provided. It is important for planners to understand how the ageing population in South Africa is evolving so that they can inform interventions towards development and policy decisions.

Increased longevity and improved health in older persons may represent noteworthy achievements for an ageing population like South Africa. However, these trends also present significant challenges. For example, an ageing population can impact economic growth, retirement, and patterns of work. It can also affect the ability of Government, its partners and communities to provide adequate resources for older adults, including the risk of dealing with age-related chronic diseases and disability.

As older persons are one of society's most diverse groups; a multisectoral, collaborative, proactive and effective policy response is a must. As the number of elderly individuals increases, the demand for specialised care and support also rises. In this context, Government, with specific reference to the Departments of Social Development and Health have a key role to play in the roll-out and strengthening of home-based care and nursing services. Such provision will provide older adults an opportunity to age gracefully in their own homes, maintaining their independence, dignity, and quality of life.

The Departments of Social Development, Health and Sports Arts and Culture in partnership with civil society organisations should continue to encourage a life course

approach and positive focus on healthy ageing to reduce the health, economic and household burden experienced by chronic illnesses, especially in advanced age cohorts. In the same vein, the youth should also be called on to play a key role in the development of a caring society, particularly for older persons.

The increasing numbers of older persons in South Africa also present favourable research opportunities for Government, academia and research institutions. The anticipated demographic, health and socio-economic changes can prompt researchers to study ageing in a multi-faceted manner where research findings will be crucial to understanding how to respond to the needs of an ageing population.

To advance our partnerships with key institutions, in 2014 as the Department of Social Development initiated a flagship project in this province in collaboration with the North West University, known as the Post Graduate Diploma in Population Policy Analysis. The programme is aimed at strengthening the usage of data among government officials across the continent under the auspices of the South-South Cooperation. This initiative is considered one of the best practices in the continent. Since inception of the programme, thirty-eight participants from across Africa and fourteen from South Africa have been successfully trained. The Department of Social Development has offered a scholarship to international participants as an expression to its commitment on South-South cooperation.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Reliable data assisted with driving South Africa's advancement in women's access to reproductive care, reductions in maternal death and improvements in gender equality in areas such as education and leadership. For an example, the progress made in maternal mortality is largely attributed to improvements in the roll out of antiretroviral treatment in the country, the largest Antiretroviral Therapy program in the world. Most women in South Africa have free access to modern contraceptives in public facilities. South Africa is one of the few societies in which individuals' sexual and reproductive health rights are protected by the constitution. Women in South Africa have a right to safe, legal reproductive health services, including, abortion. Abortion is legal in South Africa and has been since the Choice on Termination of Pregnancy Act was passed

in 1996. In 2022, the president signed into law the National Health Insurance act to achieve universal access to quality health care services in South Africa in accordance with the constitution.

As part of our national efforts to improve sexual and reproductive health outcomes for young people, as the Department of Social Development we have just completed the development of a National Sexual Reproductive Justice Framework Strategy waiting for approval by Cabinet and we have also introduced the Comprehensive Sexuality Education. This was done to equip adolescents and teenagers with the relevant skills, knowledge, and proper understanding of their own sexuality in relation to societal expectations. The Comprehensive Sexuality Education forms part of the school curriculum and falls within the subjects of Life Orientation and Life Skills.

Over the past three decades, South Africa has come a long way in creating a country that respects and honours women's rights. Today, women are represented in every sphere of society, and even in roles that were previously male dominated. After our first democratic elections, women representation in national parliament stood at 27.7 percent, compared to a global average of 11 percent at the time. As we have entered the Seventh Administration of Government, it is pleasing to see that parliament is made up of 174 females, which equates to 43.5 percent.

This is a reflection that women continue to take their rightful place in every sphere of society, including, former defenders that were once the sole preserve of males. In the justice fraternity, women make up of a third of the Constitutional Court. Furthermore, 48 percent of the bench of the Supreme Court of Appeal comprises of women and in Superior Courts, 40 percent of the judiciary are women at the level of High Court. Since the advent of democracy in 1994, we have put policies and laws in place to empower women, to enable them to improve their lives, while closing the gender gap. This has resulted in South Africa boasting one of the highest female literacy rates in Africa.

We have also seen more female learners sit for matric than males and more female learners achieve a Bachelors pass. It is important to note that, when it comes to gender parity in higher education institutions, South Africa's Gender Parity Index is among the highest in the world, and fares better than its BRICS counterparts and the average of

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development countries. Female enrolment rate at Graduation rates for female students remained consistently higher than those for male students.

Ensuring women's full participation within the economy is essential to achieve equity, prosperity and shared and inclusive growth. To demonstrate the commitment to gender equality, government expanded the access of women to economic opportunity by setting aside 40 percent of public procurement for women-owned businesses. This commitment is monitored to track the number of women participating and benefitting from public procurement process. There is an increase in support for women-owned Small Medium and Micro Enterprises (SMMEs) through the National Empowerment Fund and Small Enterprise Finance Agency, which both provide financial and non-financial support to SMMEs.

These achievements are outshined, by the scourge of violence against women and children, despite many advances and interventions. Hardly a day goes by without us reading, seeing, or hearing about another tragic case of women who have suffered horrific abuse at the hands of trusted partners, or about children that have been violated by adults. In recognition of the need to do more, government in 2022 signed into law three pieces of legislation to step up the fight against the scourge of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). The new laws also form part of government's implementation of resolutions of the Presidential Summit against GBVF.

The newly enacted laws are: The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act Amendment Act 13 of 2022, The Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Act 12 of 2022, and The Domestic Violence Amendment Act 14 of 2022. Recent development includes the enactment of National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Act in 2024.

The latter Act provides a legislative framework towards the establishment of a statutory body National Council on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, which will be responsible for providing strategic leadership on the elimination of Gender-Based Violence and Femicide in South Africa. These laws, therefore, enhance protection of victims of gender-based violence and make it more difficult for perpetrators to escape

justice. They are an affirmation of government's commitment to fight the scourge of GBVF and advance our 365 Days of Activism against the abuse of women and children.

The laws such as these, are designed to empower women and to provide pathways for women to liberate themselves from abusive relationships. Empowering women is one of the important levers in fighting the prevalence of GBVF. The Department of Social Development's specific interventions, include, amongst others the introduction of the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre. The Centre operates a National, 24 hour, Seven days-a-week Call Centre facility. The facility employs Social Workers who are responsible for call-taking and call referrals and provide psychosocial support services for victims/survivors of violence and abuse.

Through the National Student Financial Aid Scheme, we have made tertiary education more accessible to young people from poor backgrounds. We have implemented Skills Development through a variety of programmes and initiatives, including, skills programmes, learnerships, apprenticeships, internships, and bursaries, that are facilitated by the applicable Sector Education and Training Authority. The Development Skills is coordinated through the National Skills Development Strategy and funded through the National Skills Fund.

In conclusion, we would like to join the UNFPA in making a call to all of us as Government, Civil Society, Partners, Business and Academia to make investments in making available reliable, timely, culturally relevant data, broken down by gender, ethnicity, and other factors. Reliable population data are more important than ever and must be used to reach and respond to the needs of those who have been left behind. New and innovative data tools can bring invisible issues to light and illustrate the full picture of people's experiences.

Let us embrace this opportunity with both hands as we strive to improve our country's population through credible data and interventions.

I thank you