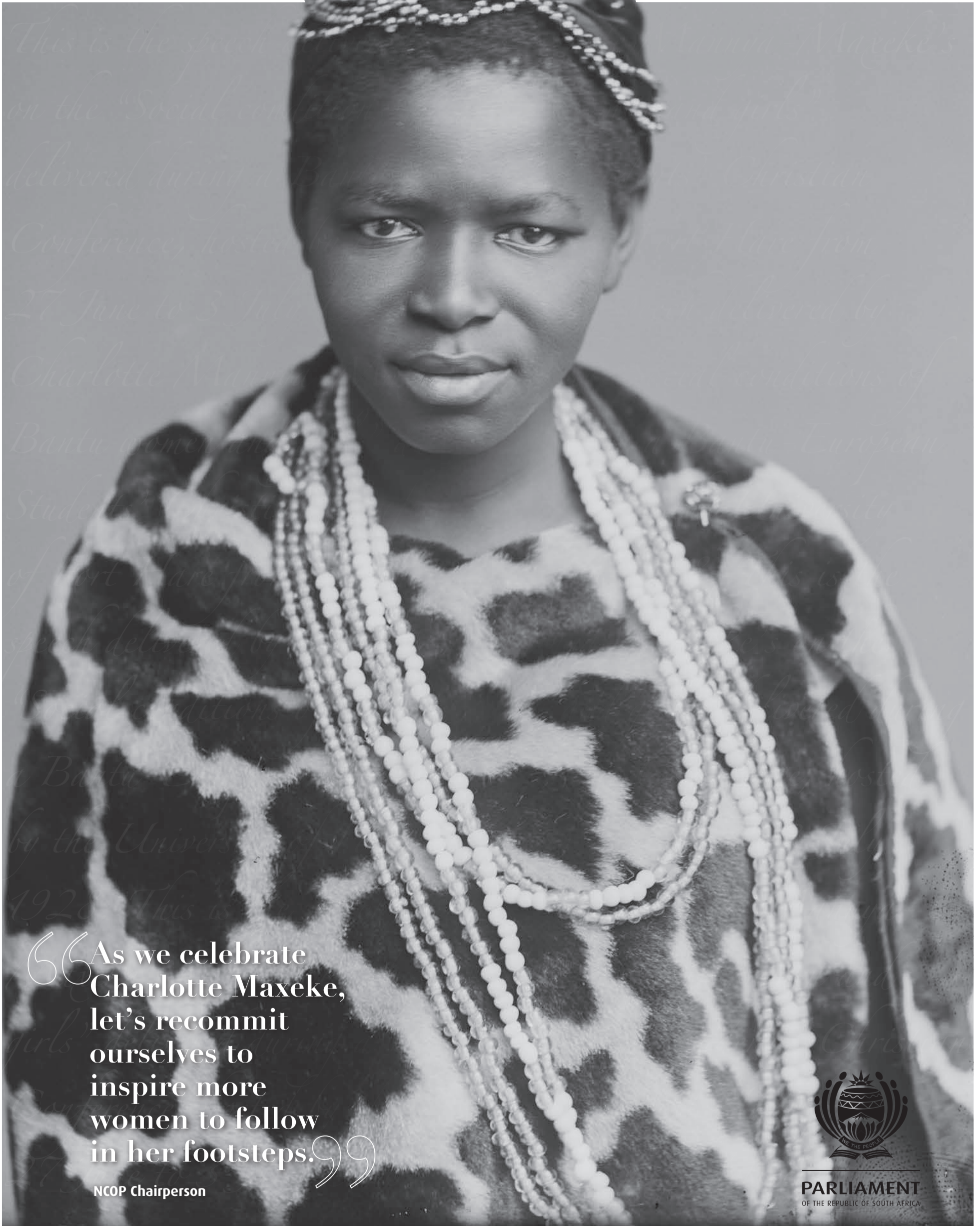


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# in session



Special Edition



“As we celebrate Charlotte Maseko, let’s recommit ourselves to inspire more women to follow in her footsteps.”

NCOP Chairperson



PARLIAMENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# As we celebrate Charlotte Maxeke, let's recommit ourselves to inspire more women to follow in her footsteps, says NCOP Chairperson

*As part of its commemoration of the late struggle stalwart, Ms Charlotte Manny-Maxeke's 150<sup>th</sup> year, Parliament hosted virtual memorial lectures. One of those memorial lectures was delivered by the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP), Mr Amos Masondo.*



**Mr Amos Masondo**  
Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces

Delivering the lecture on the theme "Choose to Challenge", based on the theme of the 2021 International Women's Day, Mr Masondo said: "In celebrating a giant like Charlotte Maxeke, the big question to ask is: what better way to accelerate gender equality and women's participation across all sectors of society, 27 years into our democracy?"

In trying to answer this critical question, Mr Masondo said: "One is inundated with many living examples of women in top leadership positions from across the length and breadth of the country and the continent. It seems proper that the first thing to do is to celebrate and support them so that they can multiply."

Mr Masondo said in January this year, Prof Puleng Lenka Bula assumed the position of Principal and Vice-Chancellor of the University of South Africa. "This was an unprecedented move. As a woman, she dismantled entrenched barriers to become the first woman to head one of the world's mega-universities and the only one of its kind in Africa. It has taken 148 years for a woman to head the University of South Africa."

Mr Masondo gave many examples of these remarkable achievements by women in South Africa, including that of Ms Tsakani Maluleke, the first woman to become South Africa's Auditor-General after 109 years of this office and the South African Local Government Association's head, Ms Thembi Nkadimeng.

At the start of the past century, women's role was primarily a domestic one, of child-rearing and household chores. However, since the inception of the democratic government in 1994, the Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) directed that focus should be on ensuring a full and equal role for women in every aspect of the economy and society. "Further, it stated that we must unlock boundless energies and creativity suppressed by racism and discrimination," Mr Masondo emphasised.

Since then, South Africa has made great strides in developing the legislative framework and implementing programmes to facilitate women's full participation in all social, economic and political spheres. At the centre of these efforts is the Constitution, which provides for equality for all persons.

Supporting and celebrating women requires commitment to finding effective and sustainable structural mechanisms to ensure that women's potential in leadership roles is realised. Mr Masondo pointed to the government's commitment to the policy that 40% of public procurement should go to women-owned businesses.

The public sector has made significant progress in ensuring women's representation in key levers of power. However, Mr Masondo urged that more needs to be done in the private sector. In 2018, "We celebrated the appointment of Ms Basani Maluleke to the position of Chief Executive Officer of the

African Bank," he said. "She became the first black woman to lead a South African bank. However, her resignation earlier this year has raised eyebrows. It left unanswered questions in relation to the ability of corporate South Africa to support black women's leadership."

Mr Masondo was concerned to hear opinions that her resignation had nothing to do with her performance. This is what happens when we fail to support and celebrate women's achievement:

Important gains are reversed; and

The struggle for the acceleration of gender equality and women's participation across all sectors of society gets compromised.

Instead of further burdening women for daring to lead, we must support and celebrate their success. This would serve as an encouragement to many aspirant women leaders and practitioners.

Supporting and celebrating the success of women leadership is the antithesis of the PHD (or pull her down) syndrome. It requires of us to remove barriers so that others may rise. In return, we expect those who manage to move up the ladder to, as the saying goes, lift as they rise.

Mr Masondo submitted that one of the ways to accelerate gender equality and women's participation across all sectors of society is to support and celebrate women's

achievement so that many more women could be inspired, so that many more could prevail. So that as a nation, we can address the challenges that women continue to face.

The democratic government has done much to promote gender equality through its progressive policies and programmes. Many women have ascended to the key levers of power, especially in the public sector. However, a lot still needs to be done. Gender-based violence and the failure to meaningfully support black women leadership, especially in the private sector, remain some of our modern-day challenges, chief among them being joblessness, inequality and poverty.

“But was it not Charlotte Maxeke who studied and achieved a Bachelor of Science degree? Would she not be wondering about visiting and exploring the thousands of planets and galaxies seeking to understand, like many human beings, the nature of the universe and its implications? Surely, women here too can distinguish themselves as we strive to take humanity to a higher and different level.

“As we celebrate Charlotte Maxeke, who would have marvelled at the achievements that women are making in the 21st century, let us recommit ourselves to inspire more women to follow in her footsteps and to excel. Within our institution, let’s welcome and support the newly established Parliamentary Women and Gender Rights Forum which seeks, amongst other things, to promote a rights-based approach in all areas of the workplace, including transformation, economic empowerment, leadership, a safe working environment and sustainability.

“As per the old saying, charity begins at home. There is so much more to be done.”

# Parliament celebrates an iconic leader of the oppressed and dispossessed people of South Africa

*The Multi-Party Women’s Caucus in Parliament and the Office of the Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces (NCOP) hosted the inaugural Charlotte Maxeke Memorial Lecture in honour of the legendary gender rights activist and freedom fighter, reports Sakhile Mokoena.*

The virtual lecture on the theme #Choose to Challenge and was also used to launch the Charlotte Makgomo Maxeke Legacy Year 2021. Delivering the lecture, NCOP Deputy Chairperson, Ms Sylvia Lucas, described Ms Maxeke as an iconic leader of the oppressed and dispossessed people of South Africa, a woman of great courage, great fortitude and a true daughter of the soil.

“Mme Charlotte Makgomo Manny-Maxeke has left an indelible mark in the history of our country’s painful past. She has blazed an uncommon trail through courage, servanthood and a dedication to advance the liberation of our people,” she said. Ms Lucas announced that Parliament will continue honouring Ms Maxeke

throughout the year, and in the coming months the national legislature will engage district and local municipalities across all provinces to advance the revolutionary morality embodied by the values that shaped Ms Maxeke.

“Throughout this year we will seek to write a women activists history and in that history there will be scores of names not so familiar, and those who ordinarily would never be mentioned. Throughout this legacy year, we must also take a moment and pay tribute to all other heroines like Lilian Ngoyi, Helen Joseph, Sophia Williams-De Bruyn, Rahima Moosa, Madi Hall-Xuma, Dorothy Nyembe, Adelaide Tambo, Albertina Sisulu and Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, to mention just a few,” she said.

The NCOP Deputy Chairperson also urged South Africans to take inspiration from Ms Charlotte Maxeke and her teachings, especially in tackling the challenge of gender-based violence and discrimination against women.

Ms Charlotte Maxeke is celebrated as freedom fighter and gender rights activist who challenged the status quo during a time when the social, political and legislative landscape was defined by discriminatory norms and traditions. Ms Lucas said: “During that time, patriarchy was rife and deeply entrenched. The brute force of colonialism and land dispossession created an acrimonious atmosphere where the identity and voice of Africans was forcefully



Ms Sylvia Lucas  
Deputy Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces



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Ms Adelaide Tambo

important role in profiling the struggles of women,” Ms Lucas said.

She added that in commemorating Ms Charlotte Maxeke, it was important to authentically tell her story in order to give true expression to the contribution that she has made in the liberation movement, because the contribution and participation of women in the liberation movement is often downplayed or minimised. “Patriarchy often paints a distorted picture a ‘male liberator’, who marched unaided and uninspired by the hand, voice, wisdom and courage of women,” the NCOP Deputy Chairperson said.

undermined and diminished. Additionally, African norms of patriarchy also denied women the right to speak out and be heard.

“The stark reality was that women had no place in spaces of leadership and activism. Despite these limiting beliefs, Mme Maxeke made a formidable contribution towards shifting entrenched levels of patriarchy and racial segregation. She showed fortitude and courage by daring to challenge the socio-political system that she was born into. In most of her undertakings, Mme Maxeke played an

“Today, we must commit ourselves to tell our daughters and granddaughters these stories of heroism, of women in battle, in order to ignite another generation of gallant leaders to respond to the challenges of this epoch.”

Ms Maxeke played a remarkable role in building confidence in many women of her time. She co-founded the Bantu Women’s League

of the SANNC (South African Native National Congress) in 1918, which later became known as the ANC Women’s League, to ensure that women’s participation in the liberation movement was not stifled or undermined by patriarchal norms and traditions.

She also wrote about women’s social and political situation, which was a bold effort to begin to advance the cause of gender equality and the status of women in South Africa. Among other contributions to the struggle for human rights and equality, Ms Charlotte Maxeke was also involved in protests on the Witwatersrand about low wages and participated in the formation of the Industrial and Commercial Workers’ Union (ICU) in 1920.

“As we celebrate and commemorate the life and times of the ‘Mother of Black Freedom’, we must be reminded that we stand on the shoulders of giants, some of whom have indeed made superhuman efforts to improve the human condition. Many of the heroines of our liberation movement and its enduring trajectory are the countless

gallant women, whose stories are often not told by history, or acknowledged for their contribution.

Ms Lucas also spoke strongly against gender-based violence, saying that it lowers the dignity of women and insults the integrity of the nation. “Gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) has reached alarming levels, while the material conditions of poverty as experienced by women continue to undermine their independence and status in society. We must root out GBVF in every area and locality in our society. The battle must be intensified and taken to every battleground where the lives of women are threatened, whether it’s in the home, the workplace or any other platform,” she said.

She also highlighted the need to strengthen the “gender machinery structures” throughout the country, and to accelerate the implementation of the outcomes and recommendations of the Provincial Reviews of the 1994 Women’s Charter for Effective Equality, the 1995 Beijing Platform for

Action, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as well as ensuring that the implementation of policies and laws that have been enacted by our government since 1994 delivers the necessary impact on women’s quality of life.

The year-long commemoration will also include campaigning for adequate budget allocation and budget oversight processes in order to support gender equality and develop programmes that enhance women’s empowerment. It will also call for gender equality education in schools and the implementation of women’s rights and gender power relations in the school curricula.



Ms Winnie Madikizela-Mandela

## Maxeke was a challenger and an initiator, says National Assembly Speaker

*The former Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Thandi Modise, delivered this lecture at the National Heritage Council on Human Rights. During the lecture she said that any opportunity to reflect on human rights, on the liberation struggle and reconciliation as Nelson Mandela generational legacy in the year of Charlotte Maxeke cannot be missed.*



It would be wrong to miss being present, because we are at a point in South Africa where we need to really seriously sit down and look back. Look back at our culture of human rights as a country, look back at the incompleteness of our stocks and stats, look back and not despair, but look forward, also looking at whatever we might have overdone or not followed through because it has an impact on how we are behaving today.

It’s a look back that must enable us to refocus and to accept and hopefully to develop some muscles and some fortitude to correct and to call ourselves to order to follow in the footsteps of Charlotte Maxeke, who was honest.

Maxeke was not only a challenger, but was also an initiator and it is right that we really celebrate this woman.

We celebrate her because she was also a gender activist and a human rights campaigner, a leader of communities, both men and women. It is an open secret in the African National Congress (ANC) that she was the only woman who was in the ANC when the ANC was formed in Mangaung.

She did not only recruit two men, but also encouraged them

to stand and both of these men later became presidents of the ANC and this was because obviously Charlotte could not even take a chance to stand and challenge those men, because women were not full members of the ANC.

It is important for us to look at her courage. We are told that she tackled issues, she confronted issues, she angered her male compatriots because we are told that sometimes as they are still thinking, she would be busy confronting the government of the day on issues which were important to children, important to education, and important to women.

We today celebrate this South African and today we proudly say we are gender activists because she set us up. She was a community developer, she pushed for women and family empowerment. She volunteered to get into areas where others were not able to. We are told that she was very clear that women must be made conscious of their political connection and that our political connection was nothing without the seriousness of our demands and our rights.

She was very clear that unless we understood our demands, we understood our sufferings, we understood our aspirations, we would not be able to come to where we can work together as the oppressed and focus on forgetting that which would enable us to one day to say we are a free and an equal society.

Unfortunately, we celebrate Charlotte Maxeke in a year that has a pandemic that is swallowing people and swallowing careers. We have not moved enough, because we still see the disparities between the urban and the rural, we still see the disparities between the white and the black, we still see the disparities between the man and the females.

So, 150 years on the conditions that Charlotte Maxeke fought

for, mobilised for, encouraged women to encourage men to stand up on, still persist. We are cognisant of the fact that from 1994, under the guidance of Mandela, differences were made, clinics were built, roads were built, more opportunities were made, the economic field policies were put [in place] to try to push us [in the right direction].

But we also know that we are back on the back foot because corruption crept in. It ate away from what we had actually started feeling good about building. So, corruption does hinder us because it takes away the resources to continue us as people, towards ensuring that we really can say we are a country that has entrenched our rights in the laws and in the Constitution. We are policing them as Members of Parliament and public representatives, to make sure that every cent that the state spends goes to where it should go.

Corruption then makes the disparities even worse. It hurts even more when you connect the black faces who are supposed to be destroying the disparities to ensure that equality really happens. It pains us when in the midst of these disparities, in the midst of losing work, women's rights, which we have taken so much time to build, get reversed because men's anger again is directed at the weaker women. I have always thought that you do not need a crowd to fight for what you think is right.

Mandela taught us to be honest, he taught us the basics, be punctual, be honest, stand for what you believe in even if you are the only person there. If you are sure, you are right and if you get corrected and you are not sure, take your time to go back. Never become an anarchist because some people are opposing your view.

Now if we believe that because I have the right to speak and to associate, I therefore have the right to disrupt others, then I begin to misunderstand

what we fought for because we fought for rights to be enjoyed by all. Not for my right to infringe on the rights of others. Not my right to feel comfortable with my family, to take away from the poor children, to take away from the sick, to let hospitals collapse, [to say] my family and I come first, and we are a mixed economy, I can be rich. We, in our language, say you work for what you need and that is the right thing to do.

We want to say that for South Africa to do what Mme Maxeke stood for, for South Africa to do what Madiba begged us to do, and I remember when the Truth and Reconciliation [Commission] was set up, and women from MK [uMkhonto we Sizwe] refused to go. He called us and said, "you must go", and we said "no, we are not going, we got so humiliated that we don't think that we want to open up our own wounds".

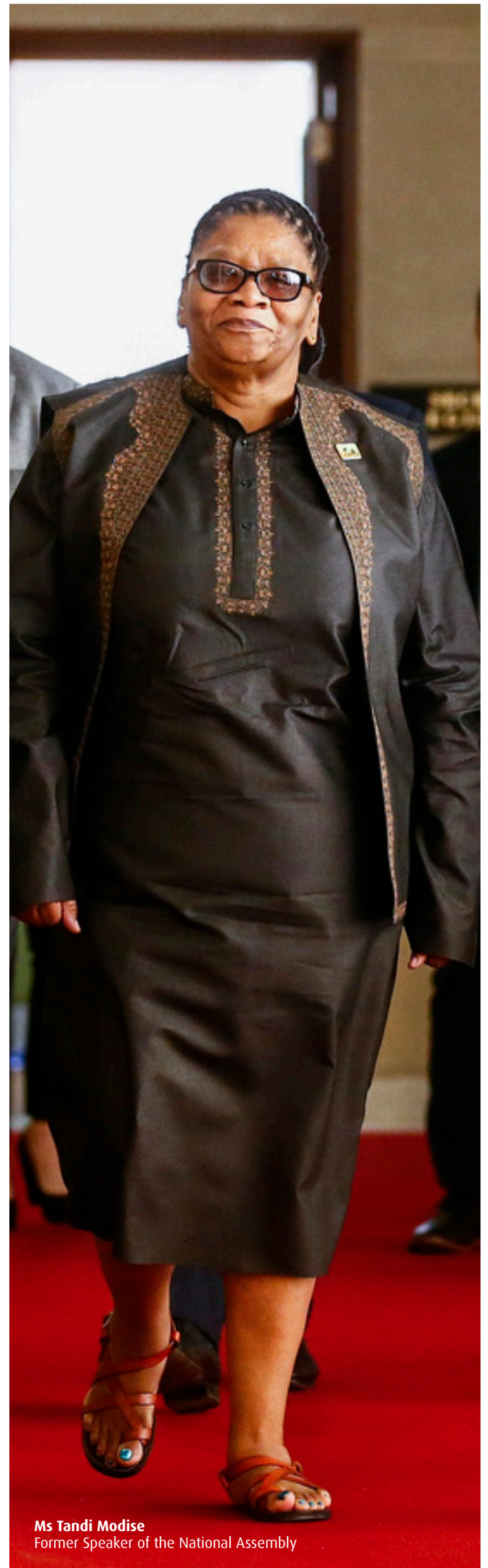
He said "reconciliation is not about your personal pain. It is that you contribute to the healing of the majority, that all of us can understand that we all went through pain, but we have come out". We need to do that when we buttress our culture of human rights as South Africa.

We need to really say that we were led by women of stature. You will remember that it is South African women who were in the front line in the formation of what was later known as the Pan-African Women Organisation, which was the forerunner of the organisation of African women. Women in South Africa have always been conscious of rights.

When we read more about Maxeke, we hear that she invited herself and became a regular at European and Bantu clubs in Pretoria, because perhaps in those years it was important for her to get closer and to appreciate what the other house was going through. Because as we later on we became aware, maybe we have been judging white

women in South Africa. We looked at the construction of families in both the black and white communities, and that is why Ma Sisulu went out of her way to say: "Initiate a

relationship which is not based on 'I work for you, pay me Madam'. Initiate a relationship between the maids and the madams which says we are both mothers."



**Ms Tandi Modise**  
Former Speaker of the National Assembly

# A pioneer who helped to shape our nation's course

*The former Speaker of the National Assembly, Ms Baleka Mbete, described Ms Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke as a pioneer who helped to shape our nation's course.*



**Ms Baleka Mbete**  
Former Speaker of the National Assembly

*“Her influence on strategies for labour bargaining by African labourers was apparent through her involvement in the Labour Movement. In this regard, she was also involved in protests on the Witwatersrand concerning the human rights and low wages of workers.”*

Delivering a commemoration lecture in 2016 on Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke at the Middelrift Multi-Purpose Centre, Ms Mbete said: “Charlotte Mannya-Maxeke was an exceptional woman, whose very action was expressive of her extraordinary intellect, determination, courage, dedication to the highest ideals, principles and love of God.”

She is known as the first black woman from South Africa to hold a graduate degree, but she was not content to rest within the relative comfort of an academic career. She knew that her education had to be used in service to her people and thus merits a place in the annals of history for her ideological contributions to “the battle of ideas”.

Ms Maxeke was among the early intellectuals in the African National Congress in the 1920s and 1930s, and her work forms part of the critical

scholarship on gender, class and racial relations in South Africa. Thus her contribution as an intellectual to the opposition of various forms of injustice, with consequences for the 20th century political landscape cannot be undervalued.

Her bold critique of the shortcomings in the intellectual project of African intellectuals of the 20th century demonstrates her familiarity and participation in the political debates of the time.

In contrast to the state's position on the African urban population, she disrupted the state's discourse of the “Native Question”.

I refer specifically to her expansion of public discourse beyond the areas that were officially designated as aspects of native life in South Africa. Her contributions questioned the uncritical translation into the modern world of

the notions of urban-rural, men-women, civilised-uncivilised. Her theorisation of the everyday realities of Africans and women in particular contributed to a critical discourse of social transformation where these contradictions did not rest in a timeless past, but played their part in the shaping of new relations in societies in transition.

This narrative is found in the documents of Charlotte Maxeke in what she viewed as the “elimination of the Bantu woman as a factor”, she drew gender inequality closer to the debate about the Native Question in South Africa.

Therefore, the contribution of Charlotte Maxeke cannot be reduced to a biographical account, or a timeline approach. Too often, women, including Charlotte Maxeke's role in the rise of black politics, is limited to a secondary status in which women are perceived

as a support structure of the struggle.

We must take care to reflect our history with more foresight and deeper analysis, especially in relation to the contributions of women. This is a challenge which I wish to put out there, especially to the University of Fort Hare where the ANC archives are held.

In an endeavour to bring to life the contributions of icons such as Charlotte Maxeke and others, Parliament launched the Memory Project, in September 2015. This was done in order to remember, honour and place in the public domain, the contributions of women in South Africa. Women who have made a positive contribution to nation building and society at large.

The Memory Project acknowledges women from across political and social

spectrums that, through their values and principles, have contributed to social, economic and political transformation in South Africa. These kinds of initiatives are much needed as we continue to fight patriarchy in society.

We consciously choose September as we wanted to signal that the time has come for us to move away from compacting the contribution of women into Women's Month, which is August.

Charlotte Maxeke was a dynamic and complex woman, whose lasting influence is found in the many spheres in which she was active. Her ascension to political prominence could be attributed to her active involvement in various spheres of society. She was a woman who took on multiple roles as a teacher, a religious leader, community leader, a social worker, an intellectual, a daughter, a wife and a mother.

Her life's work is an important lesson to all of us, and a reminder that there is always something that we can do. It is always within our power to make a difference wherever we may find ourselves at a given time. As you did today, when you participated in the silent march to the local police station to record your dissatisfaction with the high levels of gender violence prevalent in the community.

She was a revolutionary. She understood that the role of women was essential to the success of the revolution. She argued very eloquently that through organisation, and I quote: "Women must be made conscious of the political connection between our demands and their own suffering, needs and wishes, complete equality with men in law and practice, in the family, the state and in society."

Thus, we see that she was a fierce opponent of the *dompas* for black women and men, and helped to organise the anti-pass movement in

Bloemfontein in 1913. As a leader of this organisation, she led a delegation to Prime Minister Louis Botha to discuss the issue of passes for women, and this was followed up by protests the following year. These women continued to protest for respect, for freedom, driven by a solemn determination to affirm their God-given dignity.

What we learn from Charlotte Maxeke's activism is her ability to draw vital connections between history and the every-day. This connection must continue to inform our activism and our political consciousness today. Our present day activism about housing, for example, must be informed by an understanding of our country's history – Africans were dispossessed of their land. The majority of our people, and let me be clear, the majority of Africans continue to live under the devastation of the Land Act of 1913. Charlotte was able to make this connection. Are we politically conscious to make this connection?

Charlotte Maxeke was a pioneer, a woman who was not afraid to enter "traditional male spaces" and challenge the status quo. One such example we see in July 1912, when the workers met in Bloemfontein to establish a union for skilled and unskilled workers, she addressed the conference and sensitised the delegates about the need to promote the rights of women.

As a result, at the close of deliberations the delegates resolved that: "The time has

come to admit women in the Worker's Union as full members, and that they should be allowed to receive all the same rights as male members, and there should be female representatives in our conference. Furthermore, that female workers should receive equal pay as men for the same work done."

Her influence on strategies for labour bargaining by African labourers was apparent through her involvement in the Labour Movement. In this regard, she was also involved in protests on the Witwatersrand concerning the human rights and low wages of workers.

We see throughout that she was constantly seeking solutions. To actively address the human rights of workers, she set up the first employment agency for Africans in Johannesburg and participated in the formation of the Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union (ICWU) in 1920.

Her own articulations of "the promotion of women's rights" crafted a space for a discourse

which cut across race, class and gender barriers. We see this discourse evident in the labour movement today.

Charlotte Maxeke was a charismatic and dynamic leader. Her work as the president of the Bantu Women's League in 1918 presents an interesting turn in the nationalist narration on women and the struggle for liberation. At this time, women in the African National Congress only held membership without voting rights. During her presidency, the Bantu Women's League led the anti-pass campaign which became one of the most celebrated in the history of the liberation struggle

of South Africa.

Charlotte Maxeke embodies the struggle of a modern woman in her engagements with traditional structures to negotiate Western modes of life into a traditional rural society. We know from her work that she saw education for Africans as a vehicle to liberation. It was her sense of leadership that led Charlotte to respond to a call by the South African Ministry of Education to testify before several government commissions in Johannesburg on matters concerning African education, a first for an African of any gender.



## “Let us try to make our Christianity practical”

*This is the speech delivered by Charlotte Manny-Maxeke's on the “Social conditions of Bantu women and girls” delivered during a Bantu-European Students' Christian Conference, hosted by the University of Fort Hare from 27 June to 3 July 1928.*



In speaking of Bantu women in urban areas, the first thing to be considered is the home, around which and in which the whole activity of family life circulates. First of all, the home is the residence of the family and home and family life are successful only where husband and wife live happily together, bringing up their family in a sensible way, sharing the responsibilities, and naturally involved in a fair and wholehearted spirit. The woman, the wife, is the keystone of the household: she holds a position of supreme importance, for is she not directly and intimately concerned with the nurturing and upbringing of the children of the family, the future generation?

She is their first counsellor, and teacher; on her rests the responsibility of implanting in the flexible minds of her young, the right principles and teachings of modern civilisation. Indeed, on her rests the failure or success of her children when they go out into life. It is therefore essential that the home atmosphere be right, that the mother be the real “queen” of the home, the inspiration of her family, if her children are to go out in the world equipped for the battles of life.

There are many problems pressing upon us as Bantu people, to disturb the peaceful workings of our homes. One of the chief problems is perhaps the stream of natives into towns. Men leave their homes and go into big towns like Johannesburg, where they get a glimpse of a life such

as they had never dreamt it existed. At the end of their term of employment, they receive wages for which they have worked hard, and which should be used for the sustenance of their families, but attractive luxuries of civilisation are in many instances too much for them, they waste their hard-earned wages, and seem to forget completely the crying need of their families out in the veld.

The wife finds that her husband has apparently forgotten her existence, and she therefore makes her hard and weary way to the town in search of him. When she gets there she starts looking around for a house of some sort in which to accommodate herself and her children, she meets with her first rebuff. The location superintendent informs her that she cannot rent accommodation unless she has a husband. Thus she is driven to the first step on the downward path, for if she would have a roof to cover her children's heads, a husband must be found, and so we see these poor women forced by circumstances to consort with men in order to provide shelter for their families. Thus we see that the authorities, in enforcing the restrictions with regard to accommodation, are often doing the Bantu society a grievous harm, its wedded womanhood, to the first step on the downward path of sin and crime.

Many Bantu women live in the cities at a great price, the price of their children; for these women even when they live with their husbands, are

forced in most cases to go out and work, to bring sufficient money into the homes to keep their children alive. The children of these unfortunate people therefore run wild, and as there are not sufficient schools to house them, it is easy for them to live an aimless existence, learning crime of all sorts in their infancy almost.

If these circumstances obtain when husband and wife live together in the towns, imagine the case of the woman, whose husband has gone to town and left her, forgetting apparently all his responsibilities. Here we get young women, the flower of the youth of the Bantu, going up in towns in search of their husbands, and as I have already stated, living as the reputed wives of other men, because of the location requirements, or becoming housekeepers to men in the locations and towns, and eventually their nominal wives.

In Johannesburg, and other large towns, native males are employed to do domestic work, in the majority of instances, and a female domestic servant is a rarity. We thus have a very dangerous environment existing for any woman who goes into any kind of domestic service in these towns, and naturally immorality of various kinds ensues, as the inevitable outcome of this situation.

Thus we see that the European is by his treatment of the native in these ways which I've mentioned, only pushing



him further and further down the social scale, forgetting that it was he and his kind who brought these conditions about in South Africa, forgetting his responsibilities to those who labour for him and to who he introduced the benefits, and evils of civilisation. These facts do not sound very pleasant, I know, but this conference is according to my belief, intended to give us all the opportunity of expressing our views, our problems, and of discussing them in an attitude of friendliness and fair-mindedness, so that we may perhaps be enabled to see some way out of them.

#### Then we come to the Land Question

This is very acute in South Africa, especially from the Bantu's point of view. South Africa, in terms of available land, is shrinking daily owing to increased population, and too many other economic and climate causes. Cattle diseases have crept into the country, ruining many stock farmers, and thus Bantu wealth is gradually decaying. As a result, there are more and more workers making their way to the towns and cities such as Johannesburg to earn a living. And what a living! The majority earn about 3 pounds 10 shillings per month, out of which they must pay 25s for rent, 10s for tram fares, so I leave to you to imagine what sort of existence they lead on the remainder?

Here again we come back to the same old problem that I outlined before – that of the woman of the home being obliged to find work in order to supplement her husband's wages, with the children growing up undisciplined and uncared for, and the natural following rapid decay of morality among the people.

We find that in this state of affairs, the woman in despair very often decides that she cannot leave her children thus uncared for, and she therefore throws up her employment in order to care for them, but

is naturally forced into some form of home industry, which as there is very little choice for her in this direction, more often than not takes the form of the brewing and selling of Skokiaan. Thus the woman starts a career which often takes her and her children right down the depth of immorality.

The woman, poor unfortunate victim of circumstances, goes to prison, and the children are left even more desolate than when their mother left them to earn her living. Again they are uncared for, undisciplined, no one's responsibility, they prey on the undesirables with whom their mother has come into contact in her frantic endeavour to provide for them by selling Skokiaan.

The children thus become decadent, never having had a chance in life. About 10 years ago, there was

talk of industrial schools being started for such unfortunate children, but it was only talk, and we are today in the same position, aggravated by the increased numbers steadily streaming in from the rural areas, all undergoing very similar experiences to those I have just outlined.

I would suggest that there might be a conference of native

and European women, where we could get to understand each other's point of view, each other's difficulties and problems, and where, actuated by the real spirit of love, we might find some basis on which we could work for the common good of European and Bantu womanhood.

Many of the Bantu feel, and rightly too, that the laws of the land are not made for black and white alike. Take the question of permits for the right to look for work. To look for work, mark you! The poor unfortunate native, fresh from the country, does not know of these rules and regulations, naturally breaks them and is thrown into prison; or if he does happen to know the regulations and obtains a pass for six days, and is obliged to renew it several times, as is of course very often the case, he will find that when he turns up for the third or fourth time for the renewal of his permit, he is put in prison, because he has been unsuccessful in obtaining work. And not only do the Bantu

feel that the law for the white and the black is not similar, but we even find some of them convinced that there are two Gods, one for whites and one for blacks.

I had an instance of this in an old native woman who had suffered much, and could not be convinced that the same God watched over and cared for us all, but felt that the God who gave the Europeans their life of comparative comfort and ease, could not possibly be the same God who allowed his poor Bantu to suffer so. As another instance of the inequalities existing in our social scheme, we may have the fact of natives not being allowed to travel on buses and trams in many towns, except those specially designed for them.

In connection with the difficulty experienced through men being employed almost exclusively in domestic work in the cities, I would mention that this is of course one of the chief reasons for young women, who should rightly be doing that work, going rapidly down in the social life of the community; and it is here that joint service councils of Bantu and white women in service is needed, to give them proper accommodation, where they know they are safe. Provide hostels, club rooms, and rest rooms for these domestic servants, and a better and happier condition of life will come into being for the Bantu.

If you definitely and earnestly set out to lift women and children up in social life of the Bantu, you will find that the men will benefit too, and thus the whole community, both white and black. Johannesburg is to my knowledge a great example of endeavour for the upliftment of the Bantu woman, but we must pull all our energies into this task if we want to succeed. What we want is more cooperation and friendship between the two races, and more definite display of real Christianity to help us in solving these riddles. Let us try to make our Christianity practical.



# ‘Charlotte embodies the absolute tenacity, strength, courage of African women who would never give up’

*As Parliament commemorates the 150th year of Charlotte Maxeke’s birth, parliamentary writers spoke to various South Africans to get their perspective on this South African struggle stalwart. Mava Lukani spoke to Dr Mmamphelle Ramphela.*

Charlotte Manny Maxeke is regarded by black South Africans as a symbol of liberation from the triple shackles of race, class and gender.

Well first of all, Charlotte Manny Maxeke is a product of my region of South Africa, the great North, and people in that era of my father and mother’s generation. They knew the only way they can get out of the morass of being oppressed or being told that they were inferior was through education. And they excelled in education, it doesn’t matter whether it was up to Standard 6, which was the highest qualification before you become a teacher in the so called Native Teacher’s Certificate.

The fact is, they actually believed that education is the key to not just intellectual freedom, but to the freedom to shape the future you would like to see. So, whenever I go to my parents’ home in Boggom, we go past a place where the Mannyas are still concentrated. So, I wondered if somebody knew that there was this connection in addition to her being obviously an African woman leader who was way ahead of her time, to do not just a degree, but a science degree at that time, is quite revolutionary.

So, for me. Charlotte embodies the absolute tenacity, strength, courage of African women who would never give up however tough the circumstances are. And we know from our own personal history how women who were left widowed, or never got married or some tragedy, they end up making sure their children get the best education with the limited resources they had because they believed that education is the key to the future you want to share.

So, for me as a product of two teachers, it was never a question of whether, it was how far one goes in education. It wasn’t like my parents were wealthy people. In fact, my father died the first year I went to university. When I was going into matric, he said what do you want to be? I told him that I want to be a doctor and study medicine. He then asked me if I could see how sick he was, he said he would not be able to see me graduate. I told him that the Lord will provide.

That’s another thing about the strength of African women, it is the strength of the spirituality. It is not about Christianity, it is about spirituality, which is the belief in the fact that we are creatures of a power that is not just the one you meet in church. It is all around us and is in us.

So, for me, Charlotte is really an exemplar of the power of liberated women, not only liberated because they dare to dream of a future that is different from the present. That’s what comes to mind when I think of Charlotte Maxeke. I don’t know her. I have this image of a woman who carried herself with dignity, determination and had a vision.

Charlotte was a dedicated community activist and a steward of the people.

The important thing about having a vision about shaping the future you want as a reflection of Ubuntu that which we are born with as human beings. We are born to be connected to others. And so, as a leader with that philosophical orientation, our ancestor’s wisdom about *umntu ngumntu ngabanye abantu*. It’s not just a slogan, it’s a way of

life and when you have that way of life, whether you’re a lawyer, a doctor, a nurse, a social worker or a teacher, your whole professional conduct and your personal conduct and your whole political conduct is governed by that concern. What must I do to enhance the wellbeing of each and every person I am encountering? Because I’m encountering myself in that process.

Therefore, if this nation were to live with that philosophical orientation, we would not have state capture, we would not have corruption, we would not have violence, we would not have this alcohol abuse. Because you know that you embody the humanness, *ubuntu babanye abantu*, the kindness of others. Therefore, in order to keep your dignity, as part of the dignity of the people of whom you are part.

For Charlotte Maxeke, activism wasn’t a question of waving a flag or shouting a slogan. No, it was about how do I make the little piece of the world I encounter a better place for my having encountered it. It is not to make a name for yourself. It is to make the world a better place for all of God’s children.

Now the Christian teachings of love your neighbour are simply another way of

expressing this

connectedness. *uUbuntu* means

you cannot be human on your own, *ungumntu* because you are connected to others, but you are not just connected like a piece of thread. You are interdependent. Your behavior influences how other people view themselves and therefore create an environment where people feel better.

When we were in Zinyoka (a village in King William’s Town) for example, we got there and kids were malnourished with big pot bellies and fluffy hair from not having enough protein. We didn’t have money, but we encountered them as our own children, so *senza into* (we did something). A mother can’t stay with starving children; she will make a plan. So we made a plan in Zinyoka; we brought life.

We were getting people to



Dr Mmamphelle Ramphela

understand how the human body works. The child was fed and given simple porridge without ingredients (inembe); that was just starch. So if you feed a child just that, that child is going to end up with a big extended belly and red hair.

So just help people to understand nutrition value and how you create that, even with a little human. So, Charlotte Maxeke is a person like that. So when I see a hospital named after her and which was burnt down because of a PPE scandal, how is it possible that only the storerooms in Gauteng are being burnt? You have to connect the dots. But the fact is, a hospital named after a woman of that stature should have been treated to expand her name and her heritage.

It's part of her heritage that we are building on her behalf. I hope that they reopen the Charlotte Maxeke Hospital. They should treat that hospital just like your own home or like your parents' home. You don't want

hanging doors and windows at your parents' home. You would want it to be beautiful.

South Africans must emulate Maxeke's rich legacy

We are a disgrace to Charlotte Maxeke's, to Madiba's, Sisulu's, Tambo's, Biko's and Mohape's legacy because we have all we need to succeed, but we have chosen the shortcut. Why were we able to build a Zanempilo and when they banished me to Linyenye (a community in Tzaneen) we built Tsusanang, a bigger and much more expansive community, as we are still speaking now, it still exists and still works. It exists because we followed the wisdom of our ancestors, which is you can't lead until you lead yourself.

You must know who you are. So when we grew up, we were told that we were non-whites. We were the first generation of South African young black people to say we were black

and we were proud, and we are not allowing ourselves to be divided between the so-called coloureds and so-called Indians. We are all oppressed and if we want to liberate ourselves, we've got to liberate our minds from the inferiority which will allow an older person to run and loot our stores. Where is the dignity? What we did during the black consciousness, we reclaimed our dignity. We reclaimed our heritage. We reclaimed our languages and that gave us the power to shape the futures we wanted.

Now, when you are an inheritor of a liberation struggle that was fought and won at such high costs of life sacrifice, and all you want to do is what tender you want to get, who is going to be elected in what position? You rather kill your fellow party member so you can get in that position. That is a sign of being enslaved in the brain.

A free person is a person who has ubuntu, who understands that it is more important

to be respectful, respected and respecting other people because they are part of you, than to have 12 cars. What are you going to do with them? When are you going to have time to drive those 12 cars? It's the emptiness, where being ubuntu is about being. But what has replaced being in post-1994 South Africa is having. And having, you will never have enough, but being, you are content within yourself.

And so, Charlotte Maxeke, Madiba, Sisulu, Tambo, Bantu and Mohape, they were bringing all of themselves to the struggle, because what mattered was being free people. So, what we have been seeing over the last 27 years, you have had a few notable exceptions of good public leaders. But on the whole, we have had this chasing, the having, which has plunged our country today in chaos, in violence, in looting in support of freedom of a man who looted our country through state capture.

There is a serious irony that a person who has wronged who we are as a people can use as a symbol equivalent to the free Mandela. It shows you that the damage is in the head, a mental slavery. There are unemployed young people who are not properly educated, many are living in shacks because of the state capture. They don't see it and they are going to elect another leader who's similar because that's the way they think life works.

You are unlikely going to be a free person because this consciousness of who we are as human beings whilst undermined, chasing the lie that South Africa was liberated by a particular political party. No, South Africa was liberated by all of us. Old people, young people from different walks of life contributed to the freedom you are enjoying today. We dare not allow anybody to claim monopoly over this freedom. But importantly, all of us owe it to the Charlotte Maxekes of this day to treat this freedom as a sacred gift from them.

## 'A Woman of Firsts'

*Former journalist and an author Zubeida Jaffer wrote a book *Beauty of the Heart on Charlotte Mannya Maxeke*. Ms Jaffer here opens a Lesseyton window on the history of this struggle stalwart and describes Maxeke as 'a woman of firsts'.*

Charlotte Mannya Maxeke took the unusual step in 1902 to insist on the participation of women in church and political meetings. She had graduated with a BSc degree in 1901, becoming the first indigenous South African woman to achieve this. When she returned home from Ohio in the United States of America, she found herself stuck at the Cape as the country was plunged into white-on-white violence that became referred to as the Anglo-Boer War.

Her plan was to travel to Ramakgopa village to join her father and start implementing her dream of educating the local people. Nearly eight years

had passed since she had last seen her family in 1894 and in that time her mother had passed away. So it must have been with a heavy heart that she patiently waited at the Cape for the war to end.

At last in mid-1902, with the end of the war, Charlotte could finally make the journey north to what today is Limpopo Province. En route, she took her first active steps in organised politics at home when she attended the annual meeting of the South African Native Convention (SANC) or Ingqungqutela in Queenstown. This Cape-based organisation formed in 1890 was the early manifestations of efforts to

form the South African Native National Congress (SANNC) 20 years later.

She must have had some inkling that arriving at this meeting would cause controversy. In October that year she joined the gathering of delegates who came from King William's Town, Queenstown, Transvaal, Engcobo, All Saints, Herschel, Transkei, St Marks, Macibini, Mkubiso, Peelton, Somerset East, Kobonqala, Bedford, Emncontsho, Sihobothini, Glen Grey, Oxkrall and Cala. The convenor and chairperson of the congress was Mr Thomas Mqanda, the secretary was Mr Jonathan Tunyiswa and



Ms Zubeida Jaffer

the assistant secretary was Reverend Stephen Mdliva.

The place where they gathered was 10 km north of Queenstown known as Lesseyton, at the base of the Hangklip Mountain where the Tembu people lived. Church members currently at the Lesseyton Methodist Church of South Africa our gearing up to prepare the site as part of the Charlotte Mannya Maxeke Heritage Trail expected to be in focus in September this year. The church has initiated a heritage project to restore the site and record the history of the Lesseyton Methodist Mission Station. This was a place where Charlotte subsequently attended several meetings.

On that day, she was the only woman present and said she needed clarity on the purpose of the congress and its objectives. She also asked if it was possible to have women forming part of the congress. As a result, a committee was nominated to respond to her.

She had firmly placed the matter on the agenda and must have waited eagerly for the outcome. The committee tabled the matter and replied by saying the time was not yet ripe for women to lead delegations, let alone take part in civil movements. It further said it was advisable for women to form their own movements as women only.

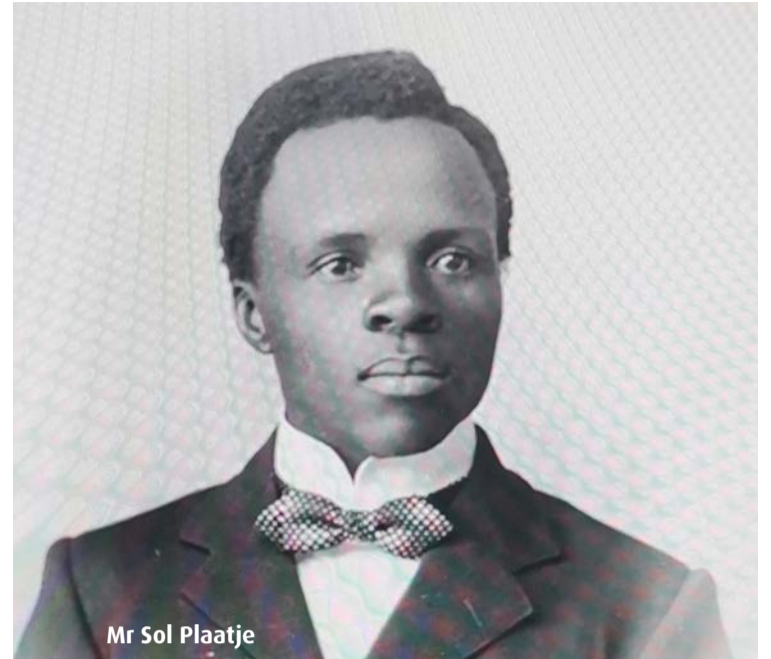
There is no record that tells us how she reacted to this decision. What is interesting though is that there was at least one man who publicly expressed his point of view on the matter. Journalist Sol Plaatje was outraged and put pen to paper. In an article in *Koranta ea Becoana*, he said that this decision reflected an imitation of whites that exclude women from their public forums.

He wrote as follows: "What was the state of affairs at the Convention? Out of a gathering of 40 robust masculine men, not one could boast of even a Kaffirian degree, while Miss Charlotte who was refused

admittance on account of her sex is, besides other attainments, a BSc of an American university and, in a report covering more than nine columns of the *Izwi*, hers was the neatest and most sensible little speech...

"We are great believers in classification, you know, but classifications of the right kind, not discrimination, and just as strongly as we object to the line of demarcation being drawn on the basis of a person's colour, so we abhor disqualification founded on a person's sex. The convention would surely have benefited by the experience of one, who though a woman, is not only their intellectual superior, but is besides leading an adventurous missionary life among the heathens of the Zoutpansberg, while they demonstrate their manliness by leisurely enjoying the sea breeze at the coast."

Not only do these words indicate the high esteem within which he held Charlotte, but they also show how advanced Plaatje and others were in their social analyses.



Mr Sol Plaatje

He rejected discrimination on the basis of colour and sex, accepting Charlotte as his equal. In this, they both stood head and shoulders above other progressives at home and across the world. The movement for women's equality was stumbling along and struggling to gain momentum locally and internationally. It was still a long way from 1994 and all South Africans getting the vote. It is interesting to note that these ideas had been fully embraced amongst some of the early intellectuals. These were

ideas and rights that are now concretised in the constitution of our democracy.

Her stand in 1902 paved the way for her become the only woman present at the formation of the ANC in 1912 and then she was not excluded from the meeting. Despite her boldness, she was written out of history and her name largely erased from collective memory as a colonial and apartheid narrative gained ascendancy, holding all of us in its pincer-like grip.



Lesseyton Methodist Church, Queenstown, Eastern Cape