

## **Budget on Debate Vote 20: Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities**

### **Speech by Nomsa Marchesi MP**

#### **DA Shadow Deputy Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities**

We still have a long way to go to combat gender-based violence and femicide

Chairperson, I would like to express my deep concern regarding the Department's performance since its establishment in 2009. Unfortunately, there is very little to show in terms of achievements, implementation, frameworks, or tools. In fact, I doubt if the Department even knows its responsibilities. This lack of progress is particularly alarming when we consider that the scourge of gender-based violence and femicide continues to rise.

Honourable Chair, the Department's role is to conduct programs that mainstream, monitor, and advocate for women. However, the results have been disappointing, to say the least. What is even more troubling is the excessive expenditure on writing reports, workshops, and conferences. In just the last three years, the Department has spent an average of over R30 million on such events.

Chairperson, I believe that South African society is already aware of Gender-Based Violence, and what we need now is to focus on monitoring and mainstreaming the mechanisms that lead to the prosecution of GBVF cases. There are several interventions that this Department can embark on to address Gender-Based Violence and Femicide. Women who experience GBV need to see the Department taking action on the following:

Our policing system often leaves victims behind. There are police officers reluctant to open cases, inadequately report on them, and properly investigate, which hinders the cases' prosecution in court.

Economic dependency plays a critical role, as financially dependent women are often hesitant to report GBV.

The alarming rate of case withdrawals highlights the lack of confidence in the State machinery.

Medical officers and doctors are sometimes unwilling to accurately fill in evidence and complete the J88 form.

Prosecutors, overwhelmed with numerous cases, may not give GBV cases the attention they deserve, wrongly believing that other cases are more traumatic.

The lengthy turnaround time from the police station to conviction or acquittal is unacceptable.

Instead of continually writing reports, the Department should choose one of these issues and report on its progress over the next five years. This approach could lead to tangible improvements.

Secondly, honourable Chair, let's address the Department's role as the custodian of the rights of people with disabilities over the past ten years. The Department's achievements in this area are questionable. One would like to raise some pertinent questions:

Has the Department drafted legislation on the rights of persons with disabilities? The answer is no. There is very little progression from the White Paper.

Are there meaningful skill-building programs providing employment opportunities for persons with disabilities? Sadly, no. Instead, they are often limited to soft skills like basket weaving.

Has government mainstreamed inclusive schooling for persons with disabilities? Regrettably, no. The Minister of Basic Education approved the Screening, Identification, Assessments and Support Policy (SIAS) to remove barriers to learning for learners with disabilities. Yet, 22% of learners of a school going age do not attend school because of an illness or disability and ordinary schools are not universally accessible to those experiencing a physical disability.

According to the Department of Labour, persons with disabilities are among the most reliable and hardworking employees. However, the 2% employment equity representation for people with disabilities is not being realized in the public or private sectors due to a lack of advocacy and awareness for this group.

Lastly, regarding women's empowerment, it is disheartening to note that in the 14 years since its inception in 2009, this Department has made little effort to empower women. Despite constituting 51% of South Africa's population, women are still underrepresented in the labour force and lack leadership positions.

To overcome these challenges, we urgently need a new mindset and fresh ideas within the Department. It is high time we change our tactics. As the old adage says, doing the same thing and expecting different results is tantamount to madness.