Good Morning and a very warm welcome to what may very well be the last NGM meeting under the current administration. We now enter the final lap before the upcoming national elections.

It is in this vein that I wish to begin by quoting Gertrude Mongella’s words in her welcoming address as the acting Secretary-General to the Fourth UN World Conference on Women, Beijing, 1995.

Quote: ".....a revolution has begun. There is no going back. There will be no unravelling of commitments. Neither today’s nor last year’s and certainly, not this decade’s commitments. This revolution is too just, too important, and certainly long overdue." Unquote

These words ring true for us today as they did then - in fact they are more relevant than ever before for us as South Africa sits on the brink of an incoming administrative change.

The bells are heralding positive changes for the gender fraternity in our country, the establishment of a Ministry for Women and Gender Affairs. I wanted us to recall Gertrude Mongella’s words to keep reminding ourselves that the gains we have made in terms of our empowerment and advancement cannot and must not be allowed to roll-back. The NGM meeting over the next two days therefore is very forward looking.
We envisage good deliberations on issues that are critically important to us in moving forward.

Since my short occupation in the portfolio of Minister in The Presidency we have been able to hold four NGM meetings, including today’s. I want to acknowledge the members who participated in these meetings and place on record my sincere gratitude for the valued inputs and information in all processes we have embarked on since September 2008 when I took office in the Presidency. Our debates and consultations have been enriched and have definitely strengthened our outputs and have given me strength to move on.

Gertrude Mongella’s words are also timely for us as we begin the county’s preparations towards the Beijing +15 review in 2010. We are beginning processes towards compiling a progress report on the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and its Platform for Action for submission to the United Nations Economic Commission as well as to the AU by 31 March 2009. Our report will contribute towards the African report to be tabled in 2010 on progress made on the continent on women empowerment and gender equality.

I am happy to also report that the CEDAW Task Team which we established in November to refine the CEDAW Report has completed its task. We have already submitted the word format electronically to the UN CEDAW Committee through our Mission in New York. We have met the deadline and we need to celebrate this achievement.

In this respect, I want to convey my heartfelt gratitude and thanks to the team, but most especially to Ms. Marthe Muller. She showed such commitment and dedication towards fulfilling all the requests we made and she did so on time. The report reads better now with the changes we made based on your contributions. Colleagues, we are now proud to state that South Africa has submitted its 2nd, 3rd and 4th periodic reports. South Africa’s fifth report is therefore due on 14 January 2013, and the NGM must ensure that the country meets this compliance obligation on time. There is no backlog, we are on track. But it is vitally important that the NGM remains vigilant on the country’s compliance towards its global commitments especially in our meeting all global reporting obligations timeously.

At the global level, we have participated in a number of activities. South Africa hosted the SADC Heads of State Summit in August last year in which the Protocol for Gender and Development was adopted by majority of the Heads of State and Governments. We are currently embarking on legal requirements and processes towards Parliament ratifying the Protocol. This process is expected to take anywhere between 6-12 months given that we are also in the election year.

The NGM will have to be part of these processes, especially in the development of a plan of action and in how we domesticate the protocol within the country.
In this context we must schedule a national conference of commitments as we did following the 1995 Beijing Conference.

We successfully hosted the SADC regional workshop on 50/50 representation of women in political and decision-making positions. A very forward looking plan of action has emerged with a concrete proposal for member states to undertake a campaign in March 2009 in this regard. Our meeting over these two days will look at this issue in depth.

We also successfully hosted the AU consultation workshop for Anglo-Lusophone countries in Johannesburg in November to review the draft AU gender policy. Following this, we also participated in the AU Meeting for Ministers in charge of Women and Gender Affairs held in Maseru in December 2008. I am happy to announce that the Ministers present at the meeting were able to adopt the draft for submission to the upcoming AU Summit in Addis.

At the national level a number of tasks have been undertaken. Sometime back in October I requested Gender Focal Points and Provincial OSW Coordinators to forward us a report covering 15 years of achievements and challenges in terms of gender issues within their institutions. This process has borne fruit. We have now received reports from about 9 departments and provinces together. These reports indicate the urgent need to develop an M&E tool and a reporting template.

Once all the reports have been received the information will be collated into a report in the near future. I must say we do have time constraints in this context as this must ensure that a strong handover report exists for the incoming administration on the status of gender equality issues in government and the challenges that still remain. I urge all of you that have not submitted the reports following my numerous appeals to please do so within this coming week.

I want to congratulate the task team established for the engendering of the Anti-poverty strategy for the great effort made in the work they were assigned. They did a splendid job. This input has been forwarded to PCAS in the Presidency to ensure that the final document speaks to the concerns raised at one of our previous NGMs. We are hoping that a meeting will be convened with us before the strategy is finalized. Once again the Task Team will represent all of us and thanks for the job well done.

However, I must unfortunately admit that we have not made much progress with the review and realignment of the National Policy Framework for Women’s Empowerment and Gender Equality. We have been constrained by the lack of a dedicated budget for this task at this stage.

However I can report that we have been pursuing seeking financial and technical assistance for this project from the Commonwealth Secretariat and I have met with Dr. Auxilia Ponga in December 2008. She has assured me that she
will attempt to accelerate this process for us so that we may still be able to accomplish this goal.

I also proposed in the NGM meeting in October that the Presidency will look into the development of a women's directory of empowerment funds available for women. Here too financial limitations have slowed progress and at this stage, the Presidency is attempting to source funding for this project. And I am hoping we can accomplish this task as it will inform the establishment of the Ministry for Women and Gender Affairs and a women's fund.

Distinguished guests, you would acknowledge by now, that the institutional mechanism we have established to drive women’s empowerment and gender equality has been very progressive and envied by other countries - so much so that we actually host a number of country’s who want to study our structures. Despite this, we face a number of challenges within the National Machinery, as identified by our previous NGM meeting in October and several other consultations, surveys and reviews.

We have undertaken to prepare a concept paper towards a model for enhancing institutional mechanisms with a particular focus on the establishment of a women’s ministry.

It consolidates all the ideas that have emanated from all the consultations and responds to the many concerns raised. This issue will be fully deliberated upon over the next two days and we must emerge with a consensus view on what institutional arrangements would best advance women in this country.

We must be able to provide the necessary guidance and make recommendations to government on the form and structure such an institution. We must debate on the issue of the name of such a ministry, what would its mandate be, what programmes would fall under this ministry and the way forward towards its establishment. We will also present this concept paper to the multi-party Joint Monitoring Committee on the Improvement to the Quality of Life and Status of Women for soliciting inputs and recommendations. We have also participated in the meeting held by the Progressive Women’s Movement of South Africa last week to look at the proposals they are putting forward on a women’s ministry. We need to consolidate this into a consensus document so that we ensure that we speak with one voice.

Programme Director,

It is therefore apparent that there is much debate at different levels and in different forums on the institutional arrangements for advancing women and gender equality. This discussion today must therefore allow all of us to feel free to share ideas and opinions and engage in serious debate on the issues.

We must ensure that our discussions enrich the concept paper so that we may emerge with a sound proposal bearing the voices of women we represent.
My earnest appeal to this meeting today is that we articulate positions that would best advance women in our country. What we decide today must be sound, practicable and achievable, as it is going to have long term ramifications for all women in our country now and in the future. As is practice, there must be room for regular reviews in order to ensure that we plan collaboratively to meet the needs of women in our country. In September 2008, I hosted a roundtable of private sector, business and funders and one of the issues we discussed was the need for strategic and coordinated planning and programmatic direction. A women’s ministry and regular reviews lends itself to such processes. In addition, I must take this opportunity to thank the Industrial Development Corporation (IDC) for their generous sponsorship of two women in the country to participate in empowerment programmes internationally.

Programme Director

It is also the time again when member states participate in the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women processes. This year the key focus is on the equal sharing of responsibilities between men and women, including care-giving in the context of HIV and AIDS.

Day 2 of our meeting has therefore been dedicated to the content discussions around this theme. Many of you will recall at the NGM meeting we held in October we dedicated a roundtable discussion to the matter of women’s unpaid work which was a cursory discussion towards the preparation for the CSW. I hope we can conclude this discussion as it will also inform the selected programmes for the ministry.

As you know, we are not really permitted a large delegation to this meeting, and therefore, unfortunately only the very relevant institutions will be invited by the Ministry to be part of our delegation. However, all of us are expected to participate at the national level in preparing this delegation. We must mandate this delegation with sound recommendations and policy issues that must be raised at the UN platform, and we expect the delegation to fulfill this mandate with absolute commitment. They will be in New York carrying the voices of the women in this country - we therefore expect them to be part of sound outcomes - both at the policy and programmatic levels from this meeting in New York.

We will be holding short meetings towards our preparation for participation in the CSW sometime in mid February.

Programme Director

I wish to conclude by stating that we are really embarking upon an extremely critical issue today which will impact on our lives forever. It is the opportunity that we have now to actually find mechanisms that will truly address those challenges we have been articulating over the past years, including the adequate financing for gender equality, the cooperatives, violence against women, poverty eradication, early childhood development to mention but a few to be
part of the programme of the NGM. There is also need to work with the Young Women's Forum.

Let us take this opportunity of transforming our institutional mechanisms to ensure that we recall the history of the struggles of the women of our country, the 1956 march to the Union Buildings by the 20 000 women against the pass laws and fulfill the demands of the Women's Charter.

Thank you and Aleuta Continuum