

**SPEECH BY DR NALEDI PANDOR, MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS  
AND COOPERATION, AT THE GERTRUDE SHOPE ANNUAL DIALOGUE FORUM:  
27/08/ 2020**

Programme Director, Ambassador Mathu Joyini;  
Norwegian Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E Ine Eriksen Sørreide;  
African Union Special Envoy for Women Peace and Security, H.E Bineta Diop;  
Executive Director of UN Women, H.E Phumzile Mlambo-Nguka;  
Distinguished Guests;  
Ladies and Gentlemen:

Let me start by welcoming you to the 2020 Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum. I also wish to acknowledge and thank our partners, specifically the Office of the Special Envoy at the AU and the Government of the Kingdom of Norway.

This forum is named after a stalwart, a revolutionary and one of the pioneering gender activists of South Africa, Mrs Gertrude Shope. We wish Mma Shope well following the celebration of her 95<sup>th</sup> birthday last week.

Later in the programme I will have the honour to pay tribute to this compelling figure whose legendary contribution to the fight against the denial of women's rights has bequeathed to us a rich and illuminating legacy which continues to inspire gender struggles in South Africa more than sixty-six years after her tenacious struggle to expand the contours of the meaning of freedom.

Our dialogue this year is taking place under the unusual circumstances of a virtual portal platform because of the COVID-19 global pandemic, which has redefined the normal way of doing business for much of the world.

While it may seem an uncomfortable exercise for those of us who are used to the traditional mode of engagement, this so-called 'new normal' in the form of virtual communication allows us to reach an audience we would not usually have access to,

and as such, we hope that the Women, Peace and Security dialogue will similarly reach a wider audience in order to communicate the message of peace and security for women.

The 2020 Gertrude Shope Annual Dialogue Forum is themed 'The Role of Women in Silencing the Guns: Building Architectures for Peace during the COVID-19 Pandemic and Beyond'.

This is a theme which echoes the confluence of current conditions shaping the experience faced by women all over the world. It is now common knowledge that both on the continent of Africa and the world over women and children are disproportionately affected by violent conflict both in terms of social violence, civil wars and terrorism. Our intention is to devise ways for women to lead in securing peace and security.

Under the current socially restrictive circumstances of COVID-19, which include safety measures such as stay-at-home and lockdowns, violence against women has notably increased, not least in our own country, South Africa. The increasing violence against women due to the COVID-19 conditions tests our resilience to the limit, and, calls for urgent action. I remain confident that this forum will emerge with appropriate responses to meet the challenge.

This year marks numerous milestones in the struggles for gender equality. These include the end of the Decade of African Women; the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; the 5<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Sustainable Development Goals and significantly, the 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UNSC Resolution 1325 on WPS.

All these milestones provide an ideal historical background that should further strengthen our determination and give impetus to our efforts to put the gender agenda at the centre of international awareness.

The African Union has declared the year 2020 theme as “Silencing the Guns: Creating Conducive Conditions for Africa’s Development”. This theme highlights the challenge of peace in Africa and serves as a call to action. It also links Africa’s development to sustainable peace, since there can be no development without durable conditions of peace and stability.

There are overlaps between the AU theme and the theme of this forum is of significance in terms of the WPS programmes. However, what we should emphasise is that the Gertrude Shope Annual Forum has boldly stressed the role of women in the intersection of these two themes, in addition to inserting the contemporaneous context of the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects.

Crises have a negative effect on women. Civil conflict, political conflict, natural disasters all result in disruption of communities and women disproportionately bear their brunt at multiple levels. Foregrounding the connections between women and peace through emphasising the active role of women as mediators and peace-builders is an antidote to the false narrative that depicts women as helpless or passive recipients. As this forum shows, women at all levels of society are very capable of taking the initiative to contribute to an elevated human agenda.

As the outbreak of COVID-19 has reconfigured the conventional modes of social engagement, including the ongoing efforts to correct and improve gender relations as well as put an end to violent conditions faced by women, there is a need for the Gertrude Shope Annual Forum to take stock of the impact of the global emergency with the aim of rethinking our traditional approach to the challenge of violence against women to ensure that our efforts are adaptive and thereby fit for purpose.

With this imperative in mind our focus this year should engender reflection on three key areas. The first should be to ensure that the Gertrude Shope Annual Forum does not suffer reversal of fortunes on progress made so far on Women, Peace and Security because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Under these abnormal conditions, history calls on us to find different ways of doing things better.

The second aim revolves on how we silence the guns in Africa, given the continued violence in different flashpoints across our continent.

Lastly, we should be able to both acknowledge, support and build on the difference women are making in local communities at their own initiative. There are many women peacebuilders on the ground working extremely hard for peace, with or without the presence of the state. The remarkable resilience women are demonstrating in local communities deserves recognition so that we can keep building on it. South Africa is a good example of this resilience of women, especially with regard to peace-building.

All of us should persist in advocating for the implementation of the WPS agenda with the aim of expanding the avenues for women to continue to contribute to a conflict-free Africa.

However, there is a need to constantly maintain our vigilance on the question of adherence to the WPS global commitments. Our forum is an important platform for strengthening our commitment to the WPS agenda and I look forward to continuing the strong collaboration we have built since its reception.

Once more my thanks to all our partner for their immense contribution to this critical programme.

Thank you.