



MINISTRY IN THE PRESIDENCY

REMARKS BY THE MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, MS SINDISIWE CHIKUNGA, AT THE LAUNCH OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN RESERVE BANK COMMEMORATIVE CIRCULATION COINS HONOURING CHARLOTTE MAXEKE'S GRADUATION AND THE 1956 WOMEN'S MARCH

Venue: South African Reserve Bank Head Office, Pretoria

Date: 26 August 2026

Time: 13h00 - 14h00

SECTION 1: SALUTATIONS

- **Programme Director**
- **Governor of the South African Reserve Bank, Mr Lesetja Kganyago**
- **Deputy Governors and Leadership of the South African Reserve Bank**
- **Representatives of Government, Business, Labour and Civil Society**
- **Members of the Diplomatic Corps**
- **Distinguished Guests**
- **Fellow South Africans**

Good afternoon.

SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION

Before I begin, allow me to extend my sincere apologies for not being able to join you physically today. Owing to parliamentary and Cabinet commitments in Cape Town, I am participating virtually. While I regret not being present in person for this important occasion, I am honoured to join you remotely as we commemorate two defining milestones in our nation's journey towards freedom, equality and justice.

Today, we gather to celebrate more than the launch of two commemorative circulation coins. We gather to honour the lives, struggles and achievements of women whose courage helped shape the democratic South Africa we enjoy today.

On behalf of the Government of the Republic of South Africa, I wish to express our appreciation to the South African Reserve Bank and Governor Lesetja Kganyago for commemorating two historic milestones: 125 years since Charlotte Maxeke became the first Black South African woman to obtain a university degree, and 70 years since the historic Women's March of 1956, when more than 20,000 women marched to the Union Buildings in protest against apartheid pass laws.

These commemorations form part of the Milestones of Freedom Programme launched by President Cyril Ramaphosa and the Platinum Jubilee of the 1956 Women's March is also one of the key milestones commemorated through a year-long programme under the theme: **"EMPOWERED WOMEN, EMPOWER NATIONS, which**

**say in isiZulu – ABANTU BESIFAZANE ABAMBATHISWE
AMANDLA BAKHA BAQINISE IZIZWE.**

SECTION 3: THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THESE COMMEMORATIVE COINS

Governor, through this initiative, the Reserve Bank reminds us that currency is more than a medium of exchange. It is also a powerful instrument of memory, identity and nation-building.

These coins will pass through the hands of millions of South Africans and, in doing so, will carry the stories of women whose leadership, resilience and sacrifice contributed to the creation of a democratic society.

Importantly, these are the first South African circulation coins to feature women. This is a significant moment in our history. For generations, women stood at the forefront of resistance, organised communities, sustained families during periods of oppression and made immeasurable contributions to the liberation struggle. Yet their contributions have too often been overlooked.

Today, South Africa affirms that our national story cannot be told without recognising the central role played by women. What a nation chooses to commemorate reflects what it chooses to value. Through these coins, we affirm that we value the courage, leadership and contributions of women and that their legacy must continue to inspire future generations.

SECTION 4: HONOURING CHARLOTTE MAXEKE

The first coin honours Charlotte Manye Maxeke, one of Africa's most remarkable pioneers.

In 1901, Charlotte Maxeke at a time when both racial discrimination and gender barriers sought to limit opportunity, she shattered expectations and expanded possibilities for generations of women to follow. Her achievement was far more than academic. It was a declaration that Black women were entitled to knowledge, dignity, leadership and equal participation in society.

Charlotte Maxeke understood the transformative power of education. Education equips citizens to challenge injustice, participate meaningfully in the economy and unlock opportunities for personal growth and national development. It remains one of the most important tools for empowerment and liberation. Today, **every young girl who aspires to become a scientist, doctor, engineer, entrepreneur, judge, senior public servant or President stands on foundations laid by pioneers such as Charlotte Maxeke.**

While South Africa has made important progress in expanding educational opportunities for women and girls, we must continue working **to ensure that educational achievements translate into meaningful economic empowerment, leadership opportunities and improved quality of life.**

SECTION 5 : THE LEGACY OF THE 1956 WOMEN'S MARCH

The second coin commemorates one of the greatest acts of collective resistance in our history. History has never remembered leaders because they occupied an office. History remembers those who created possibilities for others. **Mama Lilian Ngoyi** did not become extraordinary because she sought prominence. She became extraordinary because she organised. **Mama Helen Joseph** did not become a symbol because she pursued comfort. She became one because she embraced sacrifice. **Mama Rahima Moosa** did not leave us a legacy because she accumulated influence. She left one because she invested herself in justice. **Mama Lillian Diedrickse** did not allow education to define. She submerged herself in the liberation struggle, she used her linguistic prowess to organize and facilitate inclusion. **Mama Sophia Williams-De Bruyn's** greatness is measured by the decades she spent ensuring that the story of that march continues to inspire new generations.

Their actions demonstrated principles that would later become embedded in South Africa's constitutional democracy, including equality, participation and human dignity. **Therefore, the Women's March remains a defining example of democratic participation and active citizenship.**

As we honour their legacy, we must recommit ourselves to building an inclusive society where women, youth, persons with disabilities and other vulnerable groups are fully involved in governance, decision-making and development. The South Africa we seek cannot be built by a few; it must be shaped collectively by all its people.

SECTION 6: THE NEXT FRONTIER: ECONOMIC JUSTICE

As we celebrate these historic milestones, we must also acknowledge that the struggle for freedom is not yet complete.

While South Africa has achieved political freedom and constitutional rights, the next phase of transformation must focus on economic justice and economic emancipation. Freedom is incomplete if women remain excluded from meaningful economic participation, ownership and wealth creation.

We must therefore continue to transform ownership patterns in our economy and ensure that women, particularly Black women, rural women, young women and women with disabilities, become owners, investors, employers and industrialists.

Economic justice requires expanded access to land, finance, markets, procurement opportunities and productive assets. It requires support for women-owned enterprises and greater participation by women in strategic sectors such as mining, manufacturing, agriculture, energy, transport, digital technologies, artificial intelligence and the green economy.

The women of South Africa must not only participate in the economy; they must have the opportunity to lead and own it.

Our goal must be a South Africa where women own businesses and farms, lead industries, drive innovation and contribute fully to the economy. We must also ensure that persons with disabilities enjoy equal access to opportunities and that no woman is left behind

because of geography, disability, age or socio-economic circumstances.

SECTION 7: CONCLUSION

Governor and Distinguished Guests,

There is profound symbolism in placing Charlotte Maxeke and the spirit of the Women's March on our national currency.

Money represents value, and through these commemorative coins we are making a statement about the values we hold dear as a nation. We value equality. We value dignity. We value education. We value democracy. We value participation. We value courage. And we value women, youth and persons with disabilities.

As these coins circulate throughout our country, **may they inspire reflection on our shared history and our collective future. May they remind us that freedom was won through struggle, that democracy is sustained through participation, and that equality requires action.**

Charlotte Maxeke taught us that **education can liberate minds**. The women of 1956 taught us that **collective action can transform society**. Our Constitution teaches us that **dignity, equality and freedom belong to all**.

Let us therefore continue building a South Africa where women enjoy not only equal rights, but equal opportunities; where vulnerable

groups are not merely protected, but empowered; and where economic participation and prosperity become accessible to all.

That is the South Africa envisioned by Charlotte Maxeke. That is the South Africa for which the women of 1956 marched. And that is the South Africa we must build together.

I thank you.