



KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE MINISTER IN THE PRESIDENCY FOR WOMEN, YOUTH AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES, HON. SINDISIWE LYDIA CHIKUNGA (MP), AT THE 2025 DISABILITY-20 CONFERENCE

THEME: *“Creating Strategic Multisectoral Partnerships for a Disability-Inclusive Society”*

VENUE: Indaba Hotel, Fourways, Johannesburg

DATE: Sunday, 16 November 2025 @ 08h30 -10h15

SALUTATION:

- Programme Director;
- Chairperson of the **Disability-20 Conference Steering Committee, Dr Ashley Subbiah**;
- Vice President of the **International Disability Alliance, Professor Juan Angel De Gouveia**;
- Chairperson of the **Civil-20 Apex Leadership**, representing persons with disabilities, **Dr Zukiswa Nzo**;
- Our very own **Chief Director, Ms Phuti Mabelebele**, and the dedicated officials of the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities who continue to drive this important work;
- Disability-20 Workstream Leads and members of the organising committee;

- Representatives of the **International Disability Alliance**, the **Africa Disability Forum**, and our valued international partners;
- Representatives of **United Nations agencies**, the **diplomatic corps**, and development partners;
- Leaders from **Organisations of and for Persons with Disabilities**, including the **National Council of and for Persons with Disabilities**, **Disabled People South Africa**, and community-based organisations across our provinces;
- Senior government officials from national, provincial and local spheres;
- Representatives from **business**, **labour**, and **academia**;
- Our partners from the **Civil-20** and other **G20 engagement groups**;
- Members of the **media**;
- Distinguished guests, delegates, ladies and gentlemen.

Good Morning!

1. OPENING

On behalf of the South African government, I wish to extend a very warm welcome to all our guests attending the **2025 South African Disability-20 (D20) Conference**.

A special word of welcome goes to our international delegates — welcome to South Africa, and welcome to the continent of Africa.

We wish to acknowledge the outstanding work of the **Conference Steering Committee** in positioning the D20 as a vital platform to elevate the voices of persons with disabilities and ensure their meaningful inclusion in shaping both national and international policy. We also commend the Committee for building on the momentum of **Brazil's 2024 D20 process and outcomes**, ensuring continuity, learning, and progress in our shared global agenda.

We recognize the significance of a **Steering Committee composed of representatives from Organizations of and for Persons with Disabilities (OPDs)** and persons with disabilities themselves — providing an independent, credible platform for genuine inclusion, dialogue, and concrete action.

We further recognize and acknowledge the work of the **International Disability Alliance** and the **Africa Disability Forum**. We value your unwavering commitment to ensuring that all UN specialized agencies, funds, and programmes fully contribute to the implementation of the CRPD, and that all States include persons with disabilities as a priority group in their national plans to combat poverty.

We also commend your advocacy for the full inclusion of organizations of persons with disabilities in the design, implementation, and monitoring of these plans.

Looking at the sheer composition of delegates gathered here, we are confident that **this conference will be far more than a meeting of likeminded people**. We are certain that every delegate present takes seriously the responsibility to shape the future of the disability inclusion agenda within the G20 framework and beyond. We see this conference as an opportunity to reaffirm a commitment we first articulated during Italy's G7 Presidency: that under South Africa's G20 Presidency, disability inclusion will not be a peripheral consideration — it will be at the centre of everything we do, especially within the decision-making spaces where power is distributed and exercised.

In keeping with the theme of South Africa's G20 Presidency, **“Solidarity, Equality, and Sustainability,”** the D20 presents a unique opportunity to strengthen global solidarity, deepen cooperation across regions, and advance practical solutions that move us closer to a truly inclusive world.

2. D20 CONFERENCE TAKES PLACE DURING DRAM 2025

Dear delegates,

It is fitting that this conference takes place during our **Disability Rights Awareness Month (DRAM 2025)** under the theme *“Celebrating 30 Years of Democracy: Creating Strategic Multisectoral Partnerships for a Disability-Inclusive Society.”*

Our theme draws both its inspiration and urgency from our Constitution, our legislation, and the foundational instruments of the international disability rights movement — most notably the **United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD)** and the **Solfagnano Charter**. The emphasis on **strategic multisectoral partnerships** reflects our recognition that **the scale and pace of transformation required to build a disability-inclusive society** cannot be achieved by government alone, nor by any single sector acting in isolation.

Our theme also elevates consultative leadership. In building a truly disability-inclusive society, **we must meaningfully involve, closely consult with, and act upon the insights and recommendations** of persons with disabilities, their families, caregivers, and the OPDs that represent them at every stage of decision-making. In other words, there are no viable shortcuts to disability inclusion. It will require genuine commitment, concrete and measurable action.

In accordance with our domestic legislation and all international treaties, including the UNCRPD and the Solfagnano Charter, South Africa remains committed to

“guarantee universal access and accessibility; promote independent living; support inclusive education; advance decent employment and decent working conditions; ensure adaptable, community-based services; and harness accessible, inclusive new technologies for empowerment and participation”.

3. SOUTH AFRICA- RE-COMMITING TO A DISABILITY INCLUSIVE SOCIETY

Programme Director, for South Africa, the advancement of persons with disabilities is not an act of goodwill — it is an obligation of the state. Our **Constitution, our laws, and our Cabinet decisions** make this explicit, even to the extent of setting empowerment targets. Our policy architecture — led by the White Paper on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities — translates these commitments into clear standards for universal design, reasonable accommodation, and accountability.

4. EMPLOYMENT EQUITY, BOARDS AND PROCUREMENT TARGETS

While others are still behind, our own department has achieved 5,34% in terms of disability inclusion employment targets, Tourism us at 4.57, DTIC at 4,56 and Small Business at 3,98 and the NSG sits at 3,23%, the rest of the departments are at 3%.

To enforce the 4% employment equity target across the state, we are working with the DPSA to issue a Ministerial Directive to all departments, compelling them to employ persons with disabilities until the target is met.

To move from policy to practice, our Cabinet has directed that every board of a public entity must include at least one person with a disability. Regarding empowerment through procurement opportunities, Cabinet has also agreed that Supported Employment Enterprises (SEE) need not undergo the full tender process required by the PFMA. Departments and other public entities can now buy directly from SEE campuses for goods such as linen, furniture and uniforms. These are concrete steps that require reinforcement and continued oversight from OPDs.

5. DISABILITY INCLUSION NERVE CENTRE AS LEGACY PROJECT

As a legacy of our G20 Chairship, we are establishing the **Disability Inclusion Nerve Centre** — a national coordination and innovation hub to turn commitments into delivery. It will:

- host a **Disability Data Observatory** to harmonise data on education, employment, GBVF and service delivery;
- advance **research and innovation** on inclusive education, digital accessibility and universal design;
- support **focal points** across all spheres of government; and
- pilot **inclusive employment and enterprise projects**.

I am happy to share that on the side-lines of the G20 EWWG Ministerial Meeting, during a bilateral, the **All-China Women's Federation** committed to contribute **R2.5 million** toward its establishment. This gesture of solidarity affirms the power of international partnerships to translate global commitments into real change for persons with disabilities in South Africa.

6. PROGRESS IN CARRYING OUT THE COMMITMENT TO ELEVATE DISABILITY INCLUSION TO THE LEVEL OF A WORKING GROUP WITHIN THE G20

From the moment we took over from Brazil, South Africa was encouraged by the number of countries that approached us on the sidelines of the G7 Disability Inclusion Summit in Italy, urging us to establish a **Disability Inclusion Working Group** within the

G20. I am pleased to report that we began this work immediately, developing a concept note and convening the first Technical Meeting with the goal of establishing a **Disability Inclusion Initiative**.

We were informed that it was too late in the G20 cycle to formally establish a new Working Group. However, we insisted that it remained essential to establish a Disability Inclusion Initiative and further secure the inclusion of a **Disability Inclusion paragraph** in the G20 Leaders' Declaration. The paragraph was drafted and presented to the President of the Global Disability Alliance (GDA), who approved it.

We have also worked tirelessly to ensure that the **Empowerment of Women Working Group (EWWG)** highlights and advances the G20 spotlight on **women and youth with disabilities**. It is important to note that within the EWWG, disability has been explicitly incorporated into all three EWWG20 Priorities, which are (a) the Care Economy – paid and unpaid, (b) Financial Inclusion, and (c) Prevention of GBVF, to ensure the inclusion of women and youth with disabilities.

These priorities are inseparable from the realities of **women with disabilities**.

- **Financial inclusion** must reach women with disabilities who face compounded barriers to credit, markets and employment.
- A **care economy** that recognises and rewards care work must also address the unpaid and often invisible labour performed by women with disabilities and those who care for family members with disabilities.
- And efforts to end **gender-based violence and femicide** must include the specific vulnerabilities of women and girls with disabilities, whose access to safety, justice and rehabilitation is too often constrained by physical and social barriers.

Through this work, South Africa advanced a clear message: **gender equality cannot exist without disability inclusion**. The progress of women must encompass all women — rural and urban, young and old, with and without disabilities.

Here at home, we are taking to Cabinet a **Report on the Impact of Climate Change on Persons with Disabilities**, as well as a **Report on the State of Special Schools**, to advocate for adequate investment in inclusive education and stronger support for the educational journeys, transitions, and outcomes of youth with disabilities.

7. EXPECTED OUTCOMES

Programme Director,

Colleagues, this conference is not a conversation for its own sake. It sits within **Africa's G20 — the People's G20**, and within **Disability Rights Awareness Month**.

As we conclude, let us be clear about what we aim to leave on the table from these deliberations:

1. **A D-20 Communiqué** that captures a shared position on disability inclusion.
2. **A practical outline for mainstreaming**, inviting G20 workstreams to recognise disability inclusion as a cross-cutting enabler of **Solidarity, Equality and Sustainability**.
3. **An accessibility and data framework** to strengthen national monitoring and public reporting.
4. **Aligned partnerships** around the **Disability Inclusion Nerve Centre** — covering procurement pathways, skills pipelines, research collaboration and data-sharing.

These are not new promises; they are **next steps** that build on the work already underway.

During **Disability Rights Awareness Month**, we remind ourselves that inclusion is not charity — it is **justice**, measured in people's lives. Let us ensure that what we decide here becomes what our schools, workplaces, cities and services steadily deliver — consistently, accountably, and at scale.

To our partners at home and abroad: thank you for your engagement and for the capabilities you bring. We invite you to align your budgets, innovation and data with this programme of work. To the disability movement: your leadership remains our compass — **Nothing About Us, Without Us.**

As you proceed with your deliberations over the next two days, I wish you **fruitful discussions, bold ideas and practical resolutions** that will advance the rights, dignity and participation of persons with disabilities everywhere.

The world will not change because we made a point; it will change because we made a **plan** — and implemented it, together.

8. CONCLUSION

Dear colleagues, the disability inclusion community can continue to count on South Africa's unflinching commitment to a truly disability inclusive society.

With those few words, I would like to wish you all a productive D20 conference and I very much look forward to our continued engagement. I unfortunately have to rush back to a meeting of the National Executive Committee that is currently underway.

I thank you you.