



Press Release - National Women's Day - 09 August 2021.

"Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights for an equal future."

Johannesburg – 9 August 2021, the Consortium for Refugees and Migrants in South Africa (CoRMSA), that works to promote and protect the human rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants' communities, joins South African communities during this difficult time of the Covid-19 pandemic in paying tribute to the remarkable social and economic contributions made by the women of 1956 and the current, under the national theme of "**Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights for an equal future.**" CoRMSA re-affirms that "You strike a woman, You strike a rock".

Rooted in South Africa's past, this year marks the 65th anniversary of the events which formed the foundation of today's South African National Women's month. Subsequently, 20 000 women marched to the Union buildings on the 9th of August 1956 to protest against the extension of Pass Laws to Women. The "pass" legislation mandated every African person, including women to carry a special identity document. A system that deprived many Africans including women of their rights to freedom of movement during the Apartheid era, to mention, but a few historical moments.

In honour of this historical day, CoRMSA strongly believes that it is time we all celebrate Women's Day by reflecting on the positive and impactful sacrifices made by women, including asylum seekers, refugees and migrants. Despite these milestones, women today still face many challenges. CoRMSA suggests that these can be resolved through progressively engaging on addressing the most critical issues that these groups of minority women in South Africa and across the globe are facing and experiencing. These challenges include being denied access to, education, shelter, employment, increasing gender based violence, xenophobia, institutionalised discrimination and health care services especially sexual reproductive health. Even more concerning, during this Covid-19 pandemic, is the inability by the undocumented migrants to access Covid-19 Vaccines that require identity documents, permits or visas as a criterion for vaccine registration. This ultimately disadvantages the undocumented and stateless women.

In celebrating this day in 2021 under the theme, "**Generation Equality: Realising Women's Rights for an equal future**", with an aspiration of promoting and protecting the human rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant women and all women in general, CoRMSA calls the Department of Health to honour the health rights of asylum seekers, refugees and migrant women. This should be done by ensuring their holistic inclusion and access to health care services, particularly the Covid-19 Vaccination and treatment, regardless of their

documentation status in line with Section 27 under the Bill of Rights of the South African Constitution of 1996. CoRMSA also calls for the Department of Home Affairs to assist the Department of Health by issuing enabling documents to asylum seekers, refugees and migrant women including man and the LGBTQI group as stipulated by South African migration policies and international treaties as signed by the South African government.

Furthermore, CoRMSA calls for equality, justice, integration in all social systems, protection from xenophobic attacks, non-discrimination of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants' women so that they can equally benefit and enjoy the same freedom and rights as their counterparts. In doing so, CoRMSA would like to encourage everyone to remember the words of the late Icon Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, *"If you are to free yourself, you must break the chains of oppressing yourself. Only then can we express our dignity, only when we have liberated ourselves can we cooperate with other groups. Any acceptance of humiliation, indignity or insult is acceptance of inferiority."* On this note, CoRMSA believes that relevant authorities can continue to strengthen the voices and influence of women from all nationalities in the movement towards a democratic South Africa where inclusion, accessibility and equality prevails for all.

"Wathint Abafazi Wathint'imbokodi!"

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