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Minerals Council Women in Mining Breakfast

Good morning, Programme Director allow me to digress for a short bit. I was recently delivering a statement of support on behalf of Business and reading through it with this iPad. As is the case at these social partner events, one of the social partners brought a message forward to say he would be speaking from the heart and not a speech. I had to remind him, that at my age and my current disposition, when I speak from the heart, I forget the reality that my head was thinking about when I wrote these remarks.

What a joy it is to be in a room filled with women who move mountains and, in our case, sometimes quite literally, because that is what our mining industry does. Today, at this International Women's Day breakfast, we are not moving mountains, but we are doing something equally powerful, we are pausing to celebrate, to reflect, to recommit and most importantly, to recognise women who have in fact, moved mountains, both literally and figuratively, and are being recognised as "Our Women in Mining - Education and Development Heroes.

As you have already heard, South Africa's theme for International Women's Day is "Give to Gain". I believe that this theme could not be more fitting for a mining audience. In mining, we all understand the language of investment, you don't get value (gain) without putting in effort (giving), time, resources, and belief.

I am also acutely aware that internationally, the UN theme for International Women's Day is "Rights. Justice. Action. For All Women and Girls." reminds us that the time for good intentions alone has passed. The moment requires action that delivers rights and justice in real workplaces, real communities, and real lives.

Those that know me, will know that when I come across something like this, where, in my own little mind, I see a "perceived divergence" I quickly move on to consulting my Sage and "North Star" and as always is the case she asked me a very simple question.... Why think about these as divergent themes and not complimentary. So today, let me attempt to bring these two themes together in one clear message:

When we give, especially in education, training, development, coaching, and mentoring, we gain. We gain skills, confidence, capability, and leadership. We gain transformation, equity, and inclusion. And we take real action toward ensuring the rights of all women and girls to decent work in equitable workplaces. I would like to believe, that it is in the giving, that our industry has moved the dial on women in mining representation from about 17% in 2022 to above 21% in 2025. When we give intentionally and

deliberately give focus/effort then we can change. We have progressed, however more can be done and more is being done.

This breakfast is also special because we are recognising women heroes, women who continue to shape the education and training space and women who through education, training, coaching and mentorship are the change agents driving the sector transformation. In mining, we often applaud the final output, the tonnage, the ounces, the delivery, the numbers. But today, we honour the people who build the pipeline behind the targeted performance achievements. The women who teach, train, coach, assess, mentor, and open doors, often quietly, consistently, and with extraordinary courage. The Minerals Council is pleased to note that in a recent study that we have done, average HRD spend amongst the sample group was just over 6% (R4,8-bn).

There is a quote widely attributed to Nelson Mandela that many of us know: "Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world." In our context, education is also one of the most powerful tools we can use to change an industry. An industry that must continue evolving to be more modern, more inclusive, more human-centred and more transformed.

Programme Director, you will agree with me, that anecdotal sentiment, seems to suggest, that as a male dominated industry, mining is seen as a place where women do not naturally belong and thus many women have had to be twice as good to be considered half as credible. Many have had to navigate environments not designed for them, whether that's PPE that doesn't fit, facilities that don't accommodate, or cultures that don't welcome. The theme "Rights. Justice. Action." speaks directly to this. Rights are not a favour. Justice is not a slogan. And action is not a once-off event, it's what we do every day, in every decision, and in every system we design. It also pleasing to note that the Minerals Council women in mining strategy has and continues to address, amongst others, the issues of PPE, facilities, workplace cultures and its work on addressing GBV, which you are sure to hear about later today.

So what does action look like, specifically through skills development?

It looks like ensuring women and girls can access quality learning pathways into mining. From school mathematics and science support, to bursaries, to TVET and university partnerships, to learnerships, internships, apprenticeships, and workplace-based learning that results in real competence and real employability.

It looks like making sure training is not only offered but supported, so that women are not pushed out by unsafe environments, bias, or lack of mentorship. Because access without support is not inclusion; it's a revolving door.

It looks like recognising prior learning and creating bridges for women who have been excluded historically, so that experience, informal learning, and community-based capability can translate into formal qualifications and career mobility.

It looks like developing future-facing skills, digital, technical, leadership and problem-solving, so women are not concentrated only in "traditional" roles, but are advancing into core operational, engineering, technology, and executive positions.

And it looks like building truly equitable workplaces which bedded in fair recruitment, fair pay, fair progression, and respectful cultures, because decent work is not simply about having a job; it is about dignity, safety, and opportunity.

In the spirit of “Give to Gain,” we must be clear on what we gain when we invest in women’s skills. We gain safer and stronger teams. We gain higher productivity because diverse teams solve problems better and spot risks earlier. We gain stability because people who feel seen and supported are more likely to stay and grow. And we gain credibility as an industry because transformation is not just a compliance requirement; it is a competitiveness requirement.

There’s a line from Maya Angelou that always lands with power: “Each time a woman stands up for herself, she stands up for all women.” Today, we honour women who have stood up, not only for themselves, but for others. Women who have created ladders where there were only walls. Women who have said, “Let me show you how,” and “Come, I’ll walk with you.”

Because coaching and mentoring are not “soft extras.” They are strategic interventions. When a young woman is mentored into her first leadership role; when an artisan is coached through a difficult trade test; when a learner is supported to complete a qualification; when a supervisor is developed to lead with fairness and confidence—that is action. That is justice in motion. That is rights translated into reality.

And, since this is a breakfast, let me keep it slightly light-hearted: in mining we speak of “drilling down” into issues, but I promise the only drilling we’ll do this morning is into the croissants. Still, there is a serious point here, if we drill down to the root of many barriers women face, we often find the same things i.e. limited access to opportunity, unequal support, and workplace cultures that haven’t caught up with our aspirations. Skills development, if done properly, helps us break those barriers, not just manage them.

So, as we recognise today’s women heroes, let’s also commit to becoming heroes in our own spheres of influence. Here are three simple commitments we can all make, regardless of role or title. First, give time. If you are experienced, mentor one person. Sponsor one woman. Open one door. A single conversation can change a career trajectory.

Second, give opportunity. Ensure women get stretch assignments, real technical exposure, and leadership pathways, not only support roles. Equity means equal access to the “game-changing” experiences.

Third, give respect. Create environments where women feel safe, valued, and heard. Rights and justice are not only policy, but they are also a culture.

And if we do that, we will gain more than performance metrics. We will gain a better industry and one that reflects the talent of our country and the dignity of our people.

I’ll close with a thought often attributed to Mahatma Gandhi and colleagues I am not using this because I am Indian... “The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others.”

Today, “Give to Gain” reminds us that service is not loss, it is investment. When we give through education, training, development, coaching, and mentoring, we gain progress. We gain inclusion. We gain transformation. And we move closer to a world where the rights of all women and girls to decent work and equitable workplaces are not debated, they are guaranteed.

Thank you for being here, thank you for the work you do, and congratulations to the women heroes we celebrate today. May this breakfast be more than a moment—may it be a turning point, a renewed commitment, and a shared action.

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