

Talented women are available says Gigaba

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9 Sep 2013

The excuse that there are no women who are skilled and talented available to take the lead in science and engineering is not correct, says Minister of Public Enterprises, Malusi Gigaba.



Malusi Gigaba (Image: GCIS)

"With commitment we will find them, they are there, we just don't look hard enough or our eyes are trained to see talent only in men and we struggle to see it and find talent where women are concerned," Gigaba said.

He was speaking during the Eskom's Women in Science and Engineering event held at Eskom's Megawatt Park over the weekend. The event formed part of Eskom's 90th anniversary celebrations and served as a platform to acknowledge the significance of women in the science and engineering professions.

He said over 70% of deputy directors-general in his department are females; the executive committee is almost 50/50. He said whenever the board sends him a request for an appointment, he tells them to go out and find women suitable for the position.

Gigaba challenged all state-owned enterprises (SOEs) to take their rightful place at the forefront of developing skills particularly scarce and critical skills for South Africa.

Committed to transformation

"For the SOEs to play that role, it means that the boards, the management must be transformative in their thinking and adopt programmes that advance transformation. It also means that the shareholder must not only set high standards for companies but must also be exemplary in implementing transformation.

"I ask this question at each AGM, when are we going to reach a ratio of 50:50? Show me a robust programme of addressing gender inequality in this executive. SOEs must play a prominent role in advancing this fundamentally transformative objective and policy. If they do so SA will become a different and better place," Gigaba said.

His message to young women in school and in the corporate sector was that they should continue to raise the bar and challenge themselves to do better.

"The future is yours. When given an opportunity, excel in that opportunity and try to be the best. Exceed the bar, transcend it, go beyond the call of duty. It is you that we owe our sacrifices and energies to today," he said.

He said unless women were empowered, the freedom South Africans have enjoyed over the last 19 years, will never be enough.

"No country and no people can be free unless everybody is free. You can't have freedom for the minority and no freedom for the majority and neither can you have freedom for the majority and there's a minority that is not free, everybody must be free," Gigaba said.

Empowering women

Eskom's chairman, Zola Tsotsi, commended Gigaba for inspiring women in the fields of science and engineering, stressing the need to support him in empowering women in taking the rightful place.

"We need more women to enter these fields. Women engineers and scientists have proved that when given the chance they excel in the technical fields. When it comes to finding solutions to real world problems, engineers and scientists have to think creatively.

"The world's problems require engineers and scientists who think about problems holistically, who are as comfortable in creating designs and community development projects as they are in developing solutions in the fields of maths and science," said Tsotsi.

He added that Eskom will do whatever it takes to bring women into this profession.

"One of the priorities is to make sure that more women make up 60% of Eskom's annual intake. This is a difficult goal to achieve given that insufficient young women are coming through the education system and graduating from educational institutions," he said.

Eskom has adopted 22 schools from rural areas and awards more than 2 800 university bursaries across the country. The company says that 1,700 students in the bursary scheme are doing technical degrees and 789 of them are women.

SA Express's chief executive, Inati Ntshanga, noted that while there has been an improvement within the field of science and engineering, women are still under represented in these sectors.