



# South African Association of Women Graduates

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## THE CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR INVOLVEMENT BY SAAWG

by Siwe Coka, Incoming National President



In this first newsletter to all our members as your new National President I would like to say I have accepted the position with humility and am very aware that I am standing on the shoulders of many remarkable women who have brought us from 1923 to 2017. A remarkable achievement for any organisation and more especially for a voluntary association.

I have set out below some of the activities I have engaged in as your National President and also highlight some of the challenges and opportunities which exist for SAAWG in the coming triennium. I do hope you will engage with me so that we can take SAAWG strongly into a future which still desperately needs organisations such as SAAWG, FUWA and GWI.

- On behalf of SAAWG I have been in consultation with the National Foundation Dialogue (FW De Klerk Foundation, Thabo Mbeki Foundation, Nelson Mandela Centre for Memory, where we discussed the Van Zyl Slabbert Report on the electorate system. We took a look at the German Electorate system which serves as a dialogue point on the following issues: the current state of the nation, Governance issues, the current socio-economic system, the future of South Africa and the possibility of a Coalition Government in 2019. We looked at its implication for the developmental and transformational agenda, accountability and the role of the State President in complying with the Constitution and Parliament's failure in discharging its obligation of holding the State President to his responsibility of adhering to the Constitution.
- I also engaged in conversation with SAAGG - South African Association of Grassroot Graduates at UWC about the future of the public university, the quality and standard of the curriculum; the threat of politics on knowledge production, fees issues and the rights of the minority students; learner deficiencies and a transitional programme for first year students. We also discussed the alarming South African drop out rate at the level of tertiary education; Fees Commission of Inquiry and proposed scholar dialogue with various stakeholders about key issues that need attention particularly the role of political parties in higher education.  
***Some background:*** SAAGG was launched in 2014 by students who were concerned about the issue of legitimacy, representation, consent and political interference in higher learning institutions and the protection of students who did not want to protest with reference to SRC, PASMA, SASCO, DASO and EFF who they felt do not represent the interests of Post-graduate students. The launch was a collaboration between UWC, CPUT & UCT.
- I joined the Elders, especially Graca Mandela the widow of the former President Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela in Cape Town during the launch of 'Moving Together Campaign' on the International Madiba Day at CTICC, 18 July 2017.

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Established in 1923

SAAWG is an affiliate of Graduate Women International (GWI)  
and a member of the Federation of University Women of Africa (FUWA)

### **Also Attended**

Intergenerational victimology: The historical trauma & transformation by Prof Amanda Gouws, University of Stellenbosch, and Jonas Dlamini of the Tshisimani Centre for Activist Education on the 30 August 2017 on collective trauma.

SAAWG partnered in the launch of Marikana Reconciliation Process Initiative with the convener, Tendani Mutshai, of our Healing Circle, promoting the protection of rights of vulnerable widows and children.

To celebrate Women's Month, I attended on 9 August 2017 the celebration hosted by the Thuli Madonsela Foundation where ordinary women were honoured for their contribution to the emancipation of women.

Discussions were held with NADECO and Black Lawyers Association (Adv.Thembeni Ngcukaitobi) about the role of Legal representation and the need to defend the legal profession.

### **Future Engagements**

- We should engage with the African Union (AU), **The Pan African Institute: Dr.Benedict Lehai: Women demand Equal Participation. The objective** of Pan-African Women's Day 2017 was to launch the process of operationalization of Pan African Women's Organization (PAWO) into a specialized AU Agency, and to recognise the contributions and achievements of African women to Africa's development and liberation. Pan African Women's day is observed each year on 31st July to commemorate the first Pan African Women's Conference held in Dar es Salaam in 1962.
- We should engage in conversations around the following : World Refugee Day on 20 June and communicate with Prof Mia Swarts (Wits International Studies) and Aid Agency for Migrants on the Migration crisis. We should also explore Xenophobia which is a South African phenomenon; what is it and what could be done to avert the likelihood of it happening again.
- In conversation with Prof Jacky Silliers of International Security Studies about the Future Scenarios of South Africa it became clear that at the centre is the question of whether Vision NDP2030 will be a highway or a byway. What will happen to the aspired Rainbow Nation as delivered by Madiba and his generation?

**Reports to be studied** include SAIRR (South African Institute on Race Relations): Social grants study by Gerbrandt van Heerden, and the Poverty Report by STATS SA which painted an unfortunate picture about the status of women and children. Also, the Oxfam Report on Poverty and Inequality. The South Africa junk status impact on the future and the betterment of women and children needs to be investigated. Downgrades of the South African economy (Fitch and Moody) and the current trajectory – we must ask ourselves what does this mean and what are the implications for our continued efforts to fight poverty and for the creation of employment.

### **Future Activities**

On 16 June 2018, SAAWG lead a conversation by engaging with young people from all groups of a possible united dream of co-existing and future with no political baggage. This will be launched in rural provinces in an attempt to reach out to the marginalised youth

SAAWG is to lead the GENEVA CHALLENGE 2018 – more about this to follow.

In closing I would like to note that SAAWG, as an organization which seeks the improvement in the status of women and girls and demands the end to violence against women and children. We therefore are appalled at the number of rapes taking place as well as other forms of violence against women and children in South Africa. We also denounce the behaviour of the Zimbabwe's first lady, Grace Mugabe, and back Engel's rights to justice.

**Congratulations:**

SAAWG congratulates the following people:

Senamile Masango (KZN) who is the first African women to conduct nuclear experiment in a Nuclear lab in Switzerland;

Chandre Slinger (20) from Mitchells Plain (WP) who received the Presidential Award for Youth Empowerment under the Duke of Edinburgh's International Award for Young People;

Jenny Mare: Toyota South Africa for launching the first of its 'Women Automatician Technician programme' on the 16 August 2017 under the Toyota Empowerment Initiative. SAAGG - South African Association for Grassroots Graduates are the beneficiaries;

Sarah Louw: (EC) Mohair farmer (Uitkomst Farming Trust) became a winner in a male dominated industry;

Australian Scientists on their breakthrough on Miscarriages and Birth defects.

Please encourage your friends, colleagues, family members to join SAAWG. Please let me know how you would like to be more involved. Also, don't forget to join us on social media.

Our International body, Graduate Women International, will be celebrating 100 years in 2019 (established in 1919). SAAWG was established in 1923 making this our 94<sup>th</sup> year; an exciting time for us all to be celebrating this longevity!

With best wishes

**SIWE COKA**

*16 October 2017*