

24 NOVEMBER 2015

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM FOR NO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

Introduction

Today marks the start of the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children. This year we also celebrate the 17th anniversary of this international campaign and as we do so we need to ask ourselves: does this campaign contribute to the prevention of violence against women and children?

We know that not a single day goes by without reports of the scourge of violence against women and children.

In our years of struggle during the apartheid era, as youths we turned to our mothers for strength and comfort and as adults we protected our children in order for them to take up the fight against our oppressors. Now, 21 years into democracy it appears as if some who are fathers, brothers and sons have forgotten the value of these pillars in our community. Women and children are seen as objects upon whom men exert their anger and frustration.

Government's Justice, Crime Prevention and Security (JCPS) Cluster departments have resolved to deal decisively with gender based-violence during this year's 16 Days of Activism Campaign under the national theme: **"Count me in: Together Moving a Non-Violent South Africa Forward"**.

"Count me in!" is a rallying call to mobilise all sectors of society to stand up and be counted in the fight to end violence against women and children. It also calls on men, parents, care-givers and a united community to take a stand against all forms of abuse.

The right of women to equality, freedom, security of person, and to the other freedoms contained in the Bill of Rights of our Constitution, requires continued assertion by all. The emancipation of women, including their financial freedom, also remains a cardinal goal.

The 16 Days of Activism will this year have a greater focus on mobilising and partnering with men to assist in the eradication of violence against women and children. We as fathers, brothers and sons must take a stand in the war being waged against women and children in our homes and communities.

Men can no longer be passive bystanders. It is time to confront and hold the abusive actions of their peers to account. Now is the time for men to make their voices heard and declare publicly that enough is enough.

It is imperative that men become responsible father figures and instill the values of human dignity, equality and respect for women as part of mentoring and teaching our sons how to be men in ways that do not involve degrading or abusing girls and women.

The JCPS cluster departments will continue to heed this call by structuring programmes and events to educate and empower our communities throughout the year.

Just two months ago, the JCPS Cluster departments held several provincial service delivery meetings and public awareness programmes during Women's Month, as a build up to the 16 Days of Activism campaign. Through these programmes we engaged with thousands of women from across the Western Cape – from George to Khayelitsha – to empower the most vulnerable in our communities on the free services available to them, including maintenance and domestic violence services.

Domestic violence leaves a devastating impact on women, men and children of every background and circumstance. A family's home becomes a place of fear, hopelessness and desperation when a woman is battered by her partner, a child witnesses the abuse of a loved one, or a senior is victimized by family members.

At our public meetings, we asked women why they often never return to our courts to finalise the protection orders that they apply for and many expressed fear of reprisal from their abusers as well as financial dependency which forced them to remain in abusive relationships.

For these reasons, the JCPS cluster departments have committed to act decisively against those who abuse our women by ensuring the implementation of protection orders and interdepartmental training sessions on new strategies to give effect to the Domestic Violence Act. Our legislation empowers us to hold abusers to account and protect victims. We therefore call on survivors not to withdraw their applications for protection orders.

Government's efforts are being felt on the ground, even though much more still needs to be done to affect the laws and policies on gender-based violence.

We salute the South African Police Service (SAPS) for implementing the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences units with a special focus on crimes that are prevalent amongst vulnerable groups.

The justice system is continually being reviewed to align and improve its efficiency in addressing systematic issues such as delays in prosecuting gender-based violence cases.

Infrastructure such as sexual offences courts and victim-friendly rooms at police stations and Thuthuzela care centres (one-stop centres which enable rape victims to lodge a case with the police and receive counselling and medical care) will continue to be established throughout the province. A new Sexual Offences Court and a Thuthuzela Care Centre (TCC) will be officially opened on 3 December 2015 at Atlantis. Sexual offences courts provide specialised victim-support services; and are geared towards prioritising these cases and securing better conviction rates.

A frontline training workshop will be held on 9 December 2015 on the Domestic Violence and Protection from Harassment Acts, to ensure the effective implementation of this legislation for SAPS and DOJ&CD officials. The provincial 16 Days campaign programme also includes a Community Dialogue on Hate Crimes against LGBTI Persons in partnership with Chapter 9 institutions and civil society.

The implementation of the Children's Act, 2005 and Children's Amendment Act, 2007 is also receiving greater attention. We all have a duty to protect our children from harm. Irresponsible parents/guardians who leave young children unattended and vulnerable to abuse are as guilty as those who commit the crime.

We must work together with police, prosecutors and courts to make sure that criminals are arrested and convicted for crimes committed against women and children.

It is with the interests of our children in mind that the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development also identified the tracing of maintenance defaulters and beneficiaries through *Operation Isondlo* as one of the focus areas for this year's 16 Days of Activism campaign in the Western Cape..

The Maintenance Court is empowered through the Maintenance Act, 1998 to make an order to attach a maintenance defaulter's pension and/or property, for future or present debts, owing to a maintenance beneficiary.

Our *Operation Isondlo* will focus on the implementation of these civil remedies to recover amounts due to a beneficiary as well as to continue with the aggressive tracing of maintenance defaulters.

This multi-disciplinary approach, in partnership with communities, has already resulted in hundreds of maintenance beneficiaries receiving regular maintenance pay-outs.

Since July to November this year the department attached the pensions of 49 maintenance defaulters to the value of R3 million.

This year we identified **1078 maintenance defaulters against whom** warrants of arrest has been issued by our courts and who collectively owe R3, 3 million. We still have to trace 600 of these defaulters who we will pursue during the 16 Days of Activism. .

Public servants and other public representatives who are maintenance defaulters will also be prioritised.

Conclusion

With these intervention programmes and the active participation by all, we are confident that our efforts will contribute to eradicating violence in our communities and restoring public confidence in our justice system.

We will continue to work together as the JCPS cluster, civic organisations and communities to ensure that in the Western Cape, no woman ever struggles alone against abuse. Let us pledge that, working together, we will emerge victorious in the struggle against sexual and gender-based violence.

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