

**Address by the Deputy Minister of Justice and Constitutional Development,
The Hon JH Jeffery, MP,
at the launch of the 16 Days of Activism Community Event,
held at the KwaMashu L Community Hall,
KwaMashu, KZN,
29 November 2021**

Programme Director,
The MEC of Social Development,
Cllr Thanduxolo Sabelo,
Distinguished guests, friends,

The 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign takes place annually from 25 November to 10 December and forms the central point of Government's comprehensive 365 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children.

It is important for us, as a Department, to keep on engaging with communities to empower them with relevant information so as to combat and prevent gender based violence and to help make sure that they know about existing resources, assistance and services to support victims of GBVF.

So why are we here in KwaMashu today?

The INK areas - Inanda, Ntuzuma and KwaMashu - have been identified as GBVF hotspots.

The 2nd Quarter crime statistics, released by the SAPS recently, lists both Inanda and Ntuzuma on the list of Top 30 police stations in the country with the most reported cases of rape.

Inanda is 4th and Ntuzuma is 30th on the list. Inanda is also very high (2nd) on the national list of police stations in terms of sexual offences.

When it comes to murder, Inanda is 1st and Ntuzuma is 22nd on the SAPS list. In view of this, it is clear that urgent intervention is required in these areas.

President Ramaphosa has referred to GBVF as South Africa's second pandemic. Gender-based violence is plaguing our country and traumatising communities.

I'm sure that most of us here today know someone who has been affected in some way or another by GBV.

Statistics SA's Demographic and Health Survey showed that, on average, one in five South African women older than 18 has experienced physical violence by a partner – that's not by a stranger, but by a partner.

Domestic disputes at home usually turn to violence, some with fatal outcomes. Substance abuse and specifically alcohol is a massive contributing factor in cases of GBV.

Violence often happens at places which should be "safe" – like schools, religious institutions, workplace environments, tertiary institutions, homes, etc. Research has confirmed that in most instances the perpetrators of GBVF are known, mostly acquaintances rather than strangers.

Following the Total Shutdown movement in 2018, the Gender-based Violence and Femicide National Strategic Plan (GBVF-NSP) was produced to respond to the GBVF crisis following the historic Presidential Summit on this subject.

Over the past two years, South Africa has had to ask itself some tough questions in relation to GBV.

Our country has some of the most advanced legislation in the world in dealing with GBV matters, so why are levels of GBV so high? And what can be done to improve under-reporting?

How geared are our courts, the SAPS and the broader criminal justice system to effectively deal with GBV?

We cannot rely on legislation only in trying to combat and prevent GBV – communities, civil society and religious institutions all have a role to play.

We also need to reflect on the effects of Covid-19 on domestic violence and GBV.

What is the effect of Covid-19 on our criminal justice response to GBV (for example, accessing protection orders after hours and the impact of lockdown on GBV).

That's why we have tried to ensure that courts remain open and that domestic violence protection orders are heard and processed during all levels of the lockdown.

The impact of Covid on all aspects of our lives has been immense.

Every single person in this country has been affected by Covid – either having it themselves, losing a loved one, suffering the effects of long Covid, losing a job or their income, having to close their business or just struggling, in some way or another, to get through their daily lives.

Figures from the Department of Basic Education show that more than 36,000 babies were delivered to girls aged 10 to 19 in the first quarter of 2021. In 2020, girls aged 10 to 19 years gave birth to over 136 000 babies.

The Department has said that the sharp increase in child and teen pregnancies was mostly attributed to Covid-19 and learners being out of school for extended periods.

As we are facing a 4th wave, it is tough for all of us.

And as people struggle to cope, many will turn to alcohol or substance abuse, which then leads to more domestic violence and GBV.

Government has put in place a number of interventions to try to combat and prevent GBV in all its forms.

There are three new pieces of legislation which strengthen our response to GBV and the protection of survivors of GBV in significant ways.

We have Sexual Offences Courts which offer a number of victim-support services such as, amongst others, court preparation services and intermediaries who convey questions and statements received from the court to the victim in a sensitive and age-appropriate manner.

We make use of in-camera testifying services for children, persons with mental disabilities, and all traumatised victims, irrespective of age.

These witnesses testify in a private testifying room and out of the physical presence of the accused and other people via a CCTV system.

The infrastructural requirements include the establishment of testifying rooms and child and adult waiting areas separate from the accused's waiting areas – this is aimed at setting the victims at ease whilst awaiting their turn in court.

In February 2020, section 55A of the Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters) Amendment Act was signed into operation meaning that for the first time Sexual Offences Courts will now be established in accordance with a statute. Section 55A of the Act empowers the Minister of Justice and Correctional Services to designate, not only a selected regional court, but also any Division of the High Court, as a Sexual Offences Court.

The Minister approved Regulations relating to Sexual Offences Courts. These Regulations set out a catalogue of support services and resources that **must** constitute a section 55A Sexual Offences Court.

These services include court support, court preparation, emotional containment, trauma debriefing, counselling, private testifying service, intermediary services and information services.

Our Sexual Offences Courts also work closely with the National Prosecuting Authority's Thuthuzela Care Centres (TCCs). The focus of the TCC model is

aligned with our current victim centric approach and is to ensure a holistic integrated service being provided to victims at these sites.

At the TCC a social worker or counsellor is there to provide counselling, medical examinations are conducted, an investigation officer will interview the survivor and take their statement, treatment and medication is given, follow-up visits are arranged and long-term counselling can also be arranged. Court preparation services are also provided.

GBV often happens behind closed doors and people don't want to speak out because they are afraid. It's usually a family member or a neighbour of a victim who notices it first.

It is extremely important to know where to go for help yourself or where to send people for help.

We need to ensure that the community knows where their nearest TCC is, where the shelters are and that they can go to the police or to a court for assistance.

Victims of gender-based violence can also call the Gender-Based Violence Command Centre toll-free on 0800 428 428 for assistance. They can also contact the Command Centre by way of a "please call me" at *120*7867# with a request that a social worker contact them. They can also sms the word "help" to 31531.

The theme for this year's 16 Days' Campaign is "The Year of Charlotte Mannya Maxeke – 16 Days of Activism – moving from awareness to accountability".

We cannot combat GBV without the help of our communities, our teachers, our religious leaders, and our community activists. Every one of us has a part to play in combating GBV.

What can all of us do to help? We can -

- Be an activist against GBV in our homes, communities, work and positions.

- Challenge cultures and practices that perpetuate gender inequalities and lead to the abuse of women and children at personal and societal level.
- Reject and report abusers- Act and don't look away
- Do not protect abusers, report them
- Challenge and denounce cultural practices that perpetuate gender inequalities
- Be sensitive and supportive to GBV victims - share helpful information and support causes near you.
- Seek personal help to change harmful behaviour such as alcohol and substance abuse
- Teach children values of respect and gender equality
- Protect children from exposure to violence and harmful content on internet and social media, including pornography and sexual solicitation
- Develop policies that prevent and deal with gender based violence in your sector, workplace and communities, and
- Organise targeted community outreach and dialogues on solutions towards a gender equal society.

These are things that we should and must do – not only for 16 days, but 365 days of the year, each day, every day.

We can prevent and combat GBV if we do it together.

I thank you.

