



**THE PRESIDENCY
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Minister of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities, Ms Maite Nkoana-Mashabane,
Ministers,
Co-chairs of the Interim Steering Committee on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, Professor Olive Shisana and Advocate Brenda Madumise-Pajibo,
Members of the Interim Steering Committee,
Our friends in the development community,
Members of the media,

Today, we are marking three milestones in our nation's struggle to end violence against women and children.

Firstly, we are marking the completion of the work of the Interim Steering Committee on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) set up in the wake of the 2018 Presidential Summit on GBV.

Secondly, the committee is handing over the six-month progress report of the Emergency Response Action Plan.

And finally, we are releasing the long-awaited National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence, which was one of the key decisions of the Presidential Summit.

Earlier this week we commemorated Freedom Day and reaffirmed our commitment to a non-racial, non-sexist, democratic, prosperous and free South Africa.

It is fitting that we achieve these milestones at this time, for the protection of the rights of women and children are fundamentally tied to our sense of nationhood.

South Africa is one of the most unsafe places in the world to be a woman.

Gender-based violence impacts black and white, young and old, rich and poor, heterosexual and people with diverse sexual orientation, gender-conforming or non-gender conforming, urban and rural.

The protests that took place last year in response to a series of high profile rapes and murders of women and girls were a clarion call from the women's movement and all of society for more to be done to combat this scourge.

They were cries of frustration and anger that despite our progressive laws, we had failed to protect women and girls from abuse, ill-treatment and femicide.

It was clear at the time that a coherent and measurable strategy to deal with this growing problem was sorely needed.

Given the magnitude of the problem, it was clear that it needed to receive the very highest degree of attention.

For this reason, I decided to locate the work of the Interim Steering Committee in the Office of the President.

The committee comprised government, civil society, development partners, researchers and scientists.

Each partner brought its unique perspective on how to address and overcome the problem of gender-based violence.

They had valuable ideas on prevention, care for survivors, ensuring justice and accountability and economic empowerment.

The committee took great care to ensure that all strategies, plans and coordinating mechanisms were developed in a transparent and accountable manner.

I was provided with regular weekly progress reports on their work.

Guided by the Presidential Summit, the committee went beyond identifying interventions to address gender-based violence and femicide, to consider the wider challenges women and children face with regards to safety and security, poverty and access to economic opportunities.

They also looked at the contestation around the rights of women and children in a climate where patriarchy and chauvinism is widely prevalent.

The Emergency Response Action Plan was born out of the need to come up with an urgent plan to deal with rising GBV cases in the middle of 2019.

The plan focused on four key interventions:

- Broadening access to justice for survivors
- Changing social norms and behaviour
- Strengthening existing architecture and promoting accountability
- The creation of more economic opportunities for women

Among other things, the plan owes its success to the buy-in of all political parties, who pledged their support following the Joint Sitting of Parliament I convened last year.

Government departments rallied around the Plan, sourcing around R1.6 billion through budget reprioritisation.

On access to justice, government budget reprioritisation allowed resources to be redirected to supporting the network of sexual offences courts, Thuthuzela Care Centres and the SAPS Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Investigation Units.

Systems to track the processing of GBV cases, the rollout of a rapid results method in courts and the establishment of a Cold Case Task Team are in combination working to ensure speedy access to justice for survivors of gender-based violence.

Evidence collection kits have been made available at all police stations.

As part of the prevention effort, mass media campaigns have been rolled out nationwide spearheaded by the Government Communication and Information System.

Other interventions targeted law-enforcement and judicial officers, as well as specific GBV awareness campaigns targeting men's formations, offenders, youth at risk and tertiary institutions.

With regards to response, care and support for survivors of gender-based violence, the number of Thuthuzela Care Centres are being increased, and access to legal aid is being broadened.

A number of government buildings have been handed over to the Department of Social Development to be used as additional shelters.

It is unfortunate that progress has been slow in opening up economic opportunities for women and addressing the scale of gendered poverty.

This is an area that requires far greater attention, especially as we work to mitigate the economic and social impact of the coronavirus pandemic and start to rebuild the economy.

We must support women's economic empowerment through preferential procurement, funding to women-owned small, medium and micro enterprises and speeding up women's access to land.

Among other things, South Africa will seek to leverage our chairship of the African Union and our participation in other regional, continental and international bodies to promote women's financial inclusion and support.

Our application to join the UN Action Coalition on economic justice earlier this year is an example of ways in which we can contribute to, and benefit from, the global women's economic empowerment agenda.

The greatest achievement of the Emergency Response Action Plan is that it fundamentally changed how

departments involved in the gender sector interacted and collaborated.

It enabled government processes that ordinarily are fraught with red tape to be fast-tracked.

It inculcated a smarter approach to using and managing resources because government departments had to stretch their apportioned budgets to meet ambitious targets.

From the outset, it was clear that this would be a short-term plan to be implemented over six months.

We have reached the end of that term, and the consolidated report being presented today covers the six months.

The Emergency Plan helped to set up a delivery mechanism for a longer-term set of interventions, and the work will now be taken over by the Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Council.

The Council will also oversee the implementation of the National Strategic Plan.

The National Strategic Plan is government and civil society's multi-sectoral strategic framework to realise a South Africa free from gender-based violence and femicide.

It recognises all violence against women – across age, location, disability, sexual orientation, sexual and gender identity, nationality and other diversities – as well as violence against children.

The NSP is premised on the equality of all gender groupings, including the LGBTQI+ community, and affirms that accessing services is human rights-based.

We will galvanise support for this Plan by creating a permanent structure to steer its implementation and budgeting for it over the MTEF period.

Let us congratulate the Interim Steering Committee for their sterling efforts in getting us to this point.

They have worked tirelessly, crisscrossing the country to engage with stakeholders and support the efficient implementation of the Plan.

I know for a fact that some of the committee members literally drove to police stations around the country to ensure that evidence testing kits were delivered.

This is but one example of the enthusiasm with which they took to their duties.

Let me also thank all our partners in the development community, in business, in the labour movement, in community-based organisations and across so many sectors for the great contribution that they have made to this effort.

In this year, which marks the end of the Decade of African Women (2010-2020) and the 25th anniversary of the adoption of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, we remain unequivocal that South Africa's

peace, stability and prosperity rests on our enduring commitment to the constitutionally guaranteed right to equality between men and women.

I hope that the finalisation of the Emergency Response Action Plan process heralds the start of a new intensified effort to combat gender-based violence and that many more milestones will be reached.

The coronavirus pandemic heightens the risk of gender-based violence as women may be experiencing emotional and physical abuse behind the walls of their homes.

This calls for heightened responsiveness, greater awareness and practical measures to assist women who find themselves in vulnerable situations.

As the country enters level 4 of our coronavirus response from tomorrow, 1 May, we have determined that persons providing services to GBV survivors are among those permitted to work.

As with all people returning to work, they would need to adhere to strict health protocols and social distancing rules.

We have made much progress, but there is still much more that needs to be done.

Let us continue with our work to realise a South Africa that is free from violence and that embraces the promise of human rights for all.

I thank you.