



RESPONSE

9th December 2021

Another 16 Days of Activism

The 16 Days of 'Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign' (16 Days Campaign) is a United Nations campaign which takes place annually from 25th November (International Day of No Violence against Women) to 10th December (International Human Rights Day). It also forms the centrepiece of the government's comprehensive '365 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children', the theme of which for 2021 is 'The Year of Charlotte Maxeke – 16 Days of Activism – moving from awareness to accountability.'

Speaking in September 2019 at an address to the nation on public and gender-based violence, President Cyril Ramaphosa announced that "We will strengthen the emergency teams at a provincial level – which bring together the police, social development, health, justice and education – to continue providing rapid and comprehensive responses to all forms of violence against women. These emergency response teams will focus in particular on violence directed at women, children and other marginalised groups, including the LGBTQIA+ community and people with disabilities."¹ But in spite of these undertakings, GBV escalated during the course of the pandemic to such an extent that it has been acknowledged as a parallel pandemic. Helplines such as the South African Depression and Anxiety Group (SADAG) and Childline have been inundated with calls for help from women and children who are victims of abuse.

Businesses such as Spar and Carling Black Label Beer have taken the initiative to include the message 'No to gender-based violence' as part of their branding. "There is #NoExcuse for women abuse. Join us and pledge **not** to raise a hand to a woman. Champion Men Take Action. Help Raise Awareness of GBV with Carling Black Label Beer."² There is also a petition to the Department of Home Affairs to amend the wedding vows/wedding formulas currently being used in their offices and by marriage officers to include an acknowledgement from the groom "To love, protect and NEVER ABUSE" his bride.³

There have been a number of awareness raising initiatives and events advocating for the end of GBV; yet they have done little to stem the tide. The question of accountability needs to be raised, and the state must accept responsibility for its inability to deal with GBV.⁴ It is important that there are tangible signs of progress being made. Below are sixteen points on which the government can be called to account.

1. There is a need for more shelters for women and children. Few shelters take children over the age of five, which can result in a mother being separated from her children.
2. Clinics need to be accessible and the nursing staff should be educated to recognize the signs of GBV. They should provide information on shelters and on how and where to lay charges.
3. Women and girls should be educated about their reproductive health and their bodily integrity.
4. Police need to be trained in how to deal with victims of GBV. Cases should be opened promptly and protection orders issued and enforced.
5. Every police station should keep a record of GBV cases.
6. Every police station must have rape kits and a have a dedicated trauma room.

7. More Sexual Offences Courts must be established.
8. Trauma counselling for those who have experienced GBV must be available, and more helplines need to be established as they are 'first respondents' to those in need of help and support.
9. Proper lighting must be installed in all areas to make it safer for women and girls who often walk long distances at night in poorly lit areas going home or waiting for unreliable and infrequent transport.
10. Proper sanitation must be available close to every home, as women are vulnerable walking to communal facilities especially at night. This also affects women's rights to dignity.
11. Steps need to be taken to stop the increasing feminization of poverty, which has been compounded by the pandemic. There should be more job opportunities for women.
12. There needs to be equal pay for equal work as there is still a wage gap between men and women.
13. Court-ordered payments of maintenance must be enforced.
14. There needs to be a further extension of the Social Relief of Distress Grant or the introduction of a Basic Income Grant (BIG) as the Child Support Grant is for the child/children and cannot support a household. This would also make women more financially independent.
15. There must be parenting programmes teaching positive discipline.
16. The passing of the Criminal and Related Matters Amendment Bill is urgent as it makes provision for evidence to be given through intermediaries or by audiovisual link. This is an effective way to protect complainants against victimization during court proceedings.⁵

There is a clear need for collaboration between the Departments of Health, Social Development, Justice and Correctional Services, Basic Education and Higher Education and Training as well as the SA Police Service, in order to provide appropriate services to women and children who are victims of violence.

Charlotte Maxeke declared "We want men who are the salvation of the young girls of their nation, who can depend on their presence; we need men who will humble themselves, so that the nation may lift them up to be the stars of Africa for future generations. That is what Africa wants. That is what the women of Africa are weeping and praying for."⁶

Lois Law

Project Co-ordinator

lois@cplo.org.za

¹ <https://www.gov.za/speeches/president-cyril-ramaphosa-address-nation-public-and-gender-based-violence-5-sep-2019-0000>

² <https://www.mediaupdate.co.za/marketing/151275/carling-black-label-launches-2021-noexcuse-campaign>

³ <https://www.change.org/p/homeaffairssa-update-south-africa-s-wedding-vows-for-grooms-to-take-a-vow-against-gender-based-violence-noexcuse-blacklabelsa?gclid=Cj0KCQiAqbyNBh>

⁴ <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/accountability>

⁵ https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/new-genderbased-violence-legislation--committee?utm_source=Politicsweb

⁶ <https://www.dw.com/en/charlotte-maxeke-mother-of-black-freedom/a-43347997>