

**Address by His Excellency, President Jacob Zuma, during the launch of the National Dialogues on Violence Against Women and Children, and the Commemoration of the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children, Lebowakgomo Civic Centre, Limpopo Province**

The Premier of the Limpopo Province, Mr Stan Mathabatha,  
The Minister in the Presidency responsible for Women, Ms Susan Shabangu,  
Deputy Ministers and MECs,  
Deputy Judge President of the Limpopo High Court Judge Fikile Mokgohloa  
Mayors, Municipal Managers and Councilors  
Members of the South African Chapter of the International Association of Women  
Judges  
Members of the South African Women Lawyers  
Traditional Leaders  
Members from the broader legal fraternity  
Leadership of Faith Based and Civil Organisations  
Fellow South Africans,

We have gathered here today to mark this important day in our country, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and Children.

We use this day each year to launch the 16 days of activism of no violence against women and children and to take stock of progress made in fighting the abuse and violence directed at women and children.

This campaign is about uniting all in our country behind one message that women and children must be safe and must feel safe at home, in the streets and anywhere in the country.

Informed by our country's Constitution which turns 20 years old next month, government is determined to use all resources at its disposal, to make the country safer for women and children.

The theme of this year's 16 Days Campaign, which says "*Count Me In: Together Moving a Non-Violent South Africa Forward*", urges all of us to fight this scourge of violence against women and children.

This year's campaign takes the form of the launch of National Dialogues on Violence Against Women and Children.

About twenty-seven Dialogues have been lined up for the various parts of the Limpopo province, to engage the victims and perpetrators. The purpose is to use the information gathered and lessons learned, to prevent the abuse of women and children and to raise awareness.

Dialogues must be held in every province. The Dialogues will provide an opportunity for government to assess its own law enforcement and social support machinery in order to enhance support for women and children.

Violence against women and children manifests itself openly in serious crimes such as murder, sexual assault, domestic violence, assault with intent to do grievous bodily harm or human trafficking.

What is of serious concern is that most women are attacked by men they know and in most cases men they are intimate with - their husbands or partners. We are losing more and more women at the hands of their violent intimate partners.

International studies show that women often turn a blind eye to the violence in their intimate relationships or sometimes prefer to live in denial or disbelief.

They also live in hope that the perpetrator will change and stop their behaviour.

The danger about living in an unattended violent relationship is that it intensifies over time until it leads to death.

Violence against women has been declared a priority crime by government. Women must not be scared to report the perpetrators to the police.

As we meet already there are horrific tales of violent attacks, such as the gang-rape of a 13 year old girl by 10 men in Nyanga, Cape Town.

It is beyond comprehension that adult men can inflict such pain on a defenceless child. Other children are sexually molested at home by relatives in some cases. These are the types of incidents that should unite us all to say enough is enough.

There are also cases of the abuse of girls in schools by teachers, some of whom even fall pregnant. Government appeals to parents and girls to report such teachers to the police and social workers.

This conduct must not be tolerated. Statutory rape must be reported to the police as it is a serious crime against children.

Women are also sexually harassed in the workplace by male supervisors who abuse their positions of power.

The workplace must be made safe for women so that they can perform and be productive in an environment conducive for work.

Women and children must be safe, and must feel safe in their country.

We should in the same vein also step up our efforts in fighting sexually orientated violence perpetrated against lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, and/or intersex people. They also deserve to be safe and feel safe, everywhere in the country.

Bakwethu

Sihlangene namhlanje ukuvulangokusemthethweni uhlelolokuqwashisa ngokuhlu kunyenzwakwabesimame nezingane.

Sikhumbuza umphakathi wonke ukuthikufanele sibambisane silwe nalesisihlavas okuhlukumeza, ukushaya, ukudlwengula, ukuthumba kanyenokubulala omame n ezingane.

Lezizigameko ziyenzeka emizininasemiphakathini eminingi.

Kufanele ziphele. Omama nezinganebanelungelo lokuphila ngokuthulanangokup hepha.

Importantly, violence against women and children is not a private matter. It is everybody's business. Neighbours must not keep quiet when they see or hear women or children being attacked or abused.

Some families take a decision to hide the abuse of children to avoid embarrassment. These incidents must be reported to the police and social workers. Children deserve justice and protection.

We have legislation in place such as the Sexual Offences Act, Children's Act, Domestic Violence Act, the Child Justice Act, Older Persons Act and many other laws which are important instruments to fight abuse.

We urge all our police officers to receive women sensitively when they come to report the cases of abuse or violence at the police stations.

A conducive environment is being created at many police stations.

The police Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units were re-established in June 2010. Members of the Units receive specialized training to deal effectively with sexual offence related case.

Police run many campaigns around this time as well, raising awareness of the services they provide.

Every Magistrate's Court has a division that deals with Domestic Violence matters.

In large offices, there are dedicated clerks and Magistrates to attend to domestic violence matters. This is yet another indicator of the measures taken by government to fight the abuse of women and children.

Women should not keep quiet, and must use all avenues to report abuse and to seek help.

Government has, through the Department of Social Development, established a 24 hour call centre, the Gender-based Violence Command Centre.

The Centre deals with issues relating to domestic violence, rape, physical abuse, indecent assault, verbal abuse/intimidation, abandoned children and non-GBV cases. A majority of cases reported involve incidence of physical violence.

The call centre handles one thousand and five hundred calls a day and these calls are handled by 40 social workers able to deal with the issues raised.

The centre refers cases of violence to the police and to social workers. Women should contact social workers to obtain phone numbers or the nearest SA Social Security Agency offices so that they can be assisted.

Such centres are important as they provide a helpful voice on the other end of the line, especially when women and children are not comfortable with speaking to family members.

The prevention of these crimes is also important.

Government's socio-economic development programmes are designed to improve the living conditions of all, especially women and children.

Some of the interventions which are continuing everywhere by government include the provision of street lighting, reliable and safer public transport, water and sanitation inside the house which create better and safer living conditions for women and children.

Going to the river to fetch water or going outside the home to use a toilet at night have become risky for women which is why government continues to provide these services in the home.

Improving the economic status of women is also paramount in order to stop the financial and economic dependence on men, which makes many women vulnerable to abuse.

Some women stay in abusive relationships because they are unemployed and depend on the perpetrator for shelter, food and all basic needs.

I have instructed the economic cluster in government to ensure that all economic programmes of government consciously include the empowerment of women.

This follows the production of the important report on the economic status of women, by the Department of Women in The Presidency.

Programmes are ongoing to improve women's access to land so that they can grow their own food and build their homes.

Women also need access to business financing and credit so that they can establish small businesses or cooperatives to generate income.

The promotion of education and training opportunities is important measures aimed at empowering women and promoting economic independence.

One of the achievements of government in alleviating poverty has been the social grants system. Many families are able to put food on the table because of the money from social grants.

Government will also continue running Victim Support and Victim Empowerment Programmes to provide much needed psycho-social support.

Government does not work alone in fighting abuse. We acknowledge all non-governmental organisations that support women in distress. They run shelters for abused women, crisis centres and call centres.

We acknowledge religious leaders, traditional leaders and community leaders to whom these cases are also reported. We appeal to them to continue supporting victims and survivors of such cases.

We recognise organisations run by women and men's organisations, raising awareness and promoting positive role models for men and boys in the campaign of promoting safer homes and communities.

Let me also applaud women in the legal profession for their participation in this important campaign.

The Department of Women is working with the South African Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges and the South African Women Lawyers Association, to host the *South African Family Law Dialogue*, as part of the sectors dialogues within the National Dialogues in the provinces.

This exercise will provide a platform for women in the judiciary, the legal profession and public service to reflection the South African family law, its implications, benefits and challenges, and whether the laws are helpful to women or not.

Compatriots

Let me emphasise that this campaign should not run for 16 days only.

We must together implement our decision taken in 2014, of running this case for the whole year, for 365 days of the year.

We appeal to every citizen and everyone living in South Africa. Let us build a society where women and children are safe, and feel safe.

All of us must play a role to achieve that goal.

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is my honour and pleasure to officially launch the campaign of 16 Days of Activism of No Violence Against Women and Children.

We wish the country well in ensuring the success of this very important campaign, and urge everyone to participate in every community.

I thank you!