

SPEECH BY PREMIER DR PHOPHI RAMATHUBA DURING THE LAUNCH OF 16 DAY OF ACTIVISM CAMPAIGN 2024

26 NOVEMBER 2024

Programme Director,
The Kgare Family,
MEC for Social Development, Ms Florence Radzilani,
MEC for Education, Ms Mavhungu Lerule- Ramakhanya
MEC Transport & Community Safety, Ms Violet Mathye
Executive Mayor of Polokwane Municipality, Cllr John Mpe
SAPS Provincial Commissioner Lieutenant General Thembi Hadebe
Kgoshi Kgabo Moloto III,
Other Traditional leadership,
Business Community/ Sponsors,
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and gentlemen

Thobela, Ndi Matsheloni, Avuxeni, Good Morning, Goie More

We are on the second day of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence (GBV) Campaign 2024 which coincides with the celebration of 30 Years of Democracy and Freedom in our land. From yesterday the 25 November 2024 to the 10th of December 2024, our country and the rest of the world will be observing this campaign.

Programme Director, as we join the global community in commemorating this year's campaign, it would be prudent for us to pause, ponder and reflect on the history of this all-important initiative. We are doing so to ensure that we interrogate, evaluate and assess the implementation of the campaign for over two decades.

The 16 Days of Activism Campaign was initiated in 1991 by the first Women's Global Leadership Institute (WGLI) held by the Centre of Women's Global Leadership (CWGL), at Rutgers University. The rationale behind the campaign was and still is to raise awareness about the devastating impact that Gender Based Violence and abuse have on women and children. Furthermore, the initiative aims to promote equality and challenge discriminatory as well as stereotypical attitudes.

Programme Director, South Africa has been participating in this campaign for Twenty-Six (26) years, it is therefore befitting that we ask ourselves these uncomfortable questions: What is the impact of the campaign in our communities? Has the government done enough to ensure that the scourge of Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) is adequately addressed? We must be brutally honest with ourselves in answering the questions.

It is a fact, that the South African government has made significant progress in putting together legislation, policies and other measures of intervention for advancing equality and empowerment of women and children. Through the Constitution and other statutory provisions, our country continues to protect human rights.

Among others, through the parliament processes the following legislative frameworks have been put in place to protect individuals against abuse:

- The Domestic Violence Act

- The Children's Act
- Maintenance Act
- The Promotion of Equity and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act
- The Criminal Law (Sexual Offences and Related Matters)

The 1st Quarter Crime Statistics indicate that government efforts are paying off in that:

- **The province recorded 3,8% decline in rape cases as well as 6,0% decrease in sexual offences.**

Programme Director, although the above is indicative of progress, our country continues to experience unprecedented levels of violence, and our province is not spared. If there is one challenge that keeps me awake at night, it is Gender-Based-Violence. I cannot sleep when a 101-year-old is raped by a 27-year-old in this province. How do I fall asleep when two women who were toiling for their families got killed and were fed to pigs? How can I even think of sleeping when siblings (sister and brother) conspired and killed a one-day old baby.

Program Director, these are some of the media headlines tainting the good name of our province. This must stop, and it must stop now. The complexity of the GBVF challenge demands that all of us be actively involved because the government alone will never win this fight. All hands should be on deck.

All of us, government, traditional leadership, the private sector, and civil society should collaborate and integrate programmes so that women and children feel safer in our province.

Programme Director, the 7th Administration with its three (03) apex priorities aims to address one of the causes of violence and abuse, which is the low status of women in the society as perceived through cultural and religious lenses. The implementation of the inclusive growth and job creation pillar will go a long way towards empowering women. A woman who is impoverished and destitute is more vulnerable to these deplorable acts (sexual exploitation, violence) than an empowered, independent one. The interconnectedness of socio-economic status and susceptibility to abuse can never be over emphasised.

Ladies and gentlemen, culture is not static. It evolves, and so is the role of women in society. It cannot be right that toxic masculinity is practised unabated because it is disguised as culture. Violence can never be accommodated as culture in any race, tribe or clan. Violence is criminal, and those who perpetrate it must face the full wrath of the law. It is also gut-wrenching that most of these crimes are perpetuated by people as close to victims as their family members.

This is a very disturbing phenomenon in that more often than not, cases of these nature never get to be reported, and if they are, there are likely to be withdrawn. It is no longer a family matter when crime is committed. Domestic violence and abuse should not be left for the family to resolve. The law must take its course, and justice must be served without any fear or favour.

Programme Director, in the same vein, some people violate and abuse women and children in the name of religion. There is no religion or church in the whole world that promotes sexual assault against children and women as an acceptable practise. If such heinous crimes are committed, the perpetrator should be brought to book irrespective of how famous or big the church leader is. It is wrong and should be condemned with the contempt it deserves.

As the provincial government, we have faith in the judiciary system of our country and therefore call for harsher sentences to be meted out to perpetrators. This will, in turn, serve as a deterrent to potential abusers.

Programme Director, I want to be unequivocal on this one. My message to parents, guardians and teachers: if a child reports that an uncle, stepdad, or neighbour displayed unbecoming behavior towards them (such as rape, harassment etc.), please believe them and immediately report the matter to (Law Enforcement Agencies) as well as seek professional help. We have trained social workers and other experts who will further process the matter. The first step towards dealing with child abuse is believing in the victim and not judging them.

During the launch of the Children's Fund (1995), the iconic statesman that had ever walked the planet, former President Nelson Mandela said, "there is no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way in which it treats its children."

Ladies and gentlemen, Limpopo is a gateway to Africa. We pride ourselves that we are a province that is strategically placed for socio-economic integration and regional investment. Unfortunately, this also attracts other criminal activities. There are some unscrupulous people who use the province as a gateway to human trafficking. Women and children from the Southern African Development Countries (SADC) are trafficked in and out of the country. However, Law Enforcement Agencies in collaboration with the Border Management Authority (BMA), work very hard to ensure that this province is not a conduit of human trafficking.

Let me conclude by indicating milestones achieved by the provincial government attributed to this campaign. We have:

- Established Provincial Steering Committee on GBVF,
- Established a Multi-Sectoral Rapid Response Team to respond and co-ordinate GBVF cases in the province. These teams are in all districts,
- Victim Empowerment Centers funded by the Department of Social Development and monitored by the Office of the Premier,
- Reduced caseload of 51%

Although the 1st Quarter Crime Statistics still revealed that Limpopo is regarded as one of the safest provinces, we shall not rest until everyone is safe in our province. The death of one woman or child is one too many.

Programme Director, as we hand over this house to the Kgare family, we as government, take pride in answering the call to serve our people. This gesture of Ubuntu reflects our commitment to being a compassionate and caring government. This is to ensure safer human settlement for all, particularly the disadvantaged. We are a government at work thus relentless and resolute in making sure that women and children are protected at all costs.

#Hands-off our children

#GBVF has no excuse

#Marriage should not be a life sentence

#Lobola is no license to kill

#Women and children are not punching bags

I thank you