

**Launch of 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children**  
**Speech by Ms BP Sonjica, MP, Minister of Water Affairs and Forestry**  
**Pioneerpark, Wemmerpark, Johannesburg**  
**14 November 2005**

Deputy Minister of Correctional Services, Ms Gillward  
Deputy Minister of Communications, Mr Padayachie  
COO of SAPO, Mr Lekofa  
CEO of SABC, Mr Mpofu  
Distinguished Guests  
Ladies and Gentlemen.

The annual 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children has become one of the most significant dates in the democratic calendar of our country. This is one of the events that make us part of the international world as it allows us to observe both the International Day of No-Violence against Women and children (on November 25), International HIV and AIDS Day (on 1 December) International Day for People Living with Disability (on 3 December) and International Human Rights Day (on December 10).

During this period it is important for all of us as a country to pause and unite in growing numbers to fight violence against women and children.

As our theme for this year says it all, we need to act against abuse. Our action against abuse needs to cater for all the citizens of our country. We need to pay particular attention and extend focus to girl children and women in the rural areas. We need to take a strong action against poverty. As we know, poverty affects to a greater degree women and girl children in rural areas where poverty has become the way of life. Let us remember, poverty can be a serious form of abuse against women and children. We can overcome this by making services accessible – services like water and electricity which severely affect the lives of women. In the rural areas, women and girl children are the ones who always have to see to it that families are provided for. This “inherent culture” needs to be given a different context through programmes like 16 Days of Activism.

Our observing this event is not by coincidence but it is consistent with the founding values of our Constitution – in particular, the principle of non-sexism. Also ours being a constitutional democracy underpinned by a Bill of Rights, we have an obligation as government to ensure that women's rights are protected as human rights. In the process of transforming our society we have to entrench these women as human rights.

Government went further to institutionalise the principle of non-sexism in our society. To date we have various machinery in place that truly demonstrates the commitment of government in its endeavour to deal with the vulnerability of women and children and other vulnerable groups in our society.

We have a gender friendly legislative framework that allows women equal participation in the mainstream activities of our society. The effort to establish and locate the Office on the Status of Women, the Office on the Status of a Child and the Office on the Status of people with disabilities is a clear indication that the vulnerable sectors of our society are given the highest regard by our government. Eleven years into democracy, men and women are all aware of the values of equality and no-discrimination in all aspects of life.

We have laws that have practicalised section 28 of the Constitution which details the rights of children. Such laws have really created sensitivity and awareness that children are actually the future of society. They should be nurtured and instil in them a sense of pride that they are the citizens of our country.

However, the challenge we are facing, like in all aspects of our life, is the effective implementation of all these laws. We need to take stock and reflect on the real barriers we might be facing. There are number of attributes to lack of effective implementation of these laws and this would include elements such as not doing enough advocacy work; being unable to sustain our campaigns; not using easily accessible language for all to understand, etc. It is unfortunate that eleven years into democracy, there are people who still undermine our democratic Constitution and our Bill of Rights. The recent killings of children in Cape Town and other parts of our country and the world, is very unfortunate.

Despite all this, we are proud to have a police service that works hard to make sure that these abuses are followed up and most of the time the perpetrators are found and punished. The programme of specialized training for police officers, making them more sensitive with cases of violence against women and children has borne fruits. There are now 40 Sexual Offences courts across the country and more are being established. This is a demonstration that government is committed to building a South Africa that truly protects all women and children.

During the 16 Days of Activism we will all respond to action and wear the white ribbons, showing solidarity to all the victimized families as well as the survivors, it is important to show that we are all united in their support. We will do this at homes, at schools, at work and in our communities. We will use this period to strengthen the ongoing fight against the abuse of women and children.

As a country we can be proud that our greatest achievement is that we have so far managed to create awareness around the issue of abuse, we know that abuse knows no class, race or creed – it has become the cancer of our society. We will continue to encourage women and children to break the silence and speak out when they are abused and when they witness abusive situations.

The celebration of the Freedom Charter on 26 June this year is most fitting not only because it has to date 50 Years of existence but because it has provided a framework to overcome the challenges of discrimination, racism and gender, injustice, stolen birthrights of land, liberty and equality. Our success of the first decade of democracy was as a result of the values enshrined in our Freedom Charter, hence our Constitution and the progressive and enabling legal framework.

Our achievements of the first decade of democracy is, I want to believe, as a result of partnerships that government has forged with both the NGOs and CBOs especially in highlighting the plight of the abused women and children.

We salute those NGOs and CBOs and we trust that they will continue to lend a hand in our quest to improve the lives of our people. Government is calling for partnerships with all sectors of our society. We urge you to support the campaign and let us all ensure that it leads to the behavioural change for the better and the positive culture in our country. Let us make the behaviour of all of us be consistent with our programmes such as the Moral Regeneration Movement and all such programmes that seek to restore the moral fibre of our society.

We look upon our religious bodies that are committed to making our society a joy to live in. As government, we come forward to lend a hand and work with you in uniting the country against many types of violence especially against violence against women and children.

We will continue to encourage women to break the silence knowing though that this may put them in danger. But we are committed to create an environment where no-one is afraid as all of us are protected by the Bill of Rights and the Constitution.

In conclusion, I would like reiterate that – real men do not molest children, real men would appreciate and not abuse their partners. We call on all South Africans to help government root

out all elements that are determined to make ours a society that is characterized by lack of respect.

It is only when we have succeeded in this campaign that we can talk about a caring and a non-sexist society. This is an ideal we have to realize in order to create sustainable communities and a responsible nation. We have to realize our ideal as espoused in the historic Freedom Charter that "...there shall be security and comfort...". This we need for a sustainable future.

I THANK YOU.