

We Will Speak Out SA, Faith Sector Conference:
"Building unity in voice and action to contribute to
South Africa's National Strategic Plan on Gender-Based Violence".

Diakonia Centre, Durban

20/02/2020



With thanks to:

Amplify Change, ACT Ubumbano and Faith 2 Action Network

all those who participated and committed to taking forward key decisions and agreements made.

Forward together to end GBV!

We Will Speak Out SA is a member of the global Side by Side Network.

Management Committee: Chair: Rev Phumzile Mabizela; Deputy Chair: Rev Bafana Khumalo, Treasurer: Mr Simon Read; Members: Ms Patricia Sibanyoni, Ms Saydoon Sayed Nisa, Ms Nompilo Gcwensa (Survivor Organisation Representative), Mr Vernon Hammond, Ms Lyn van Rooyen (Communications Consultant); Ms Amy Leigh Benn, Ms Ntwehlehle Majosi, Ms Xana McCauley, Ms Maramuke Matumaini (Survivor Organisation Representative).
Coordinator: Ms Daniela Genrich.

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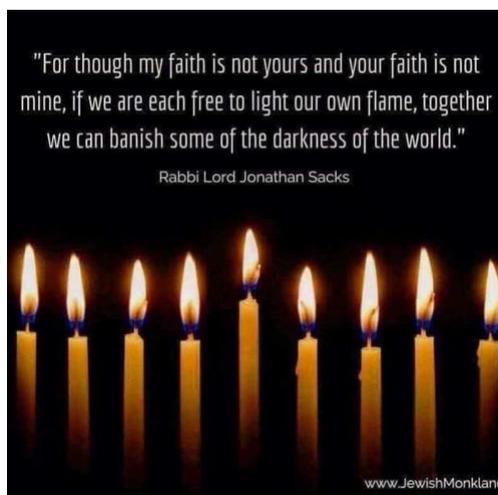
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Welcome and Introduction

The meeting started with the song 'God has taken us from a low place to a high place'. Saydoon Nisa Sayed prayed the Universal Prayer for Peace, adapted for the context of gender-based violence.

Phumzile Mabizela (chairperson of WWSOSA) welcomed everyone. She stated that this event is a collective dialogue reflecting on our responsibilities when it comes to GBV. She emphasised that we will not be silenced about abuse going on in our communities and that patriarchy oppresses women and leads to violence. She said that we are tired of this and change is needed.

Daniela Gennrich said that faith communities love to disagree, and this paralyses us. This session aims to find things that unite us, particularly concerning Gender-Based Violence. She showed a quote as inspiration for this gathering:



Session 1:

[Engaging with a Southern African Interfaith Policy Brief on Gender-Based Violence.](#)

[“We can no longer be silent as we are called to uphold human dignity for all creation”: Faith Communities Respond to Gender-Based Violence](#)

The three speakers, Zanele Makombe, Hope Dunira, and Shamiso Chigorimbo, gave brief input on the process, the main points of the Policy Brief, and why the faith sector needs to take GBV seriously. Summaries are included below as well as links to presentations where available.

Background and Summary of Main Points of the Interfaith Policy Brief On GBV in Light of the Realities In The Southern African Context. Ms Zanele Makombe, Gender and Programmes Advisor, ACT Ubumbano

Presentation available [here](#).

During 2019, ACT Ubumbano and Faith Action Network convened two in-depth consultations with faith institutions from SADC, to consider what an interfaith response to GBV might entail.

She emphasised the importance of the faith sector taking this up by saying that in the SADC region, 69-90% of people say religion is important in their lives, and a large majority attends church weekly. This is an important platform, and Zanele emphasised that we should be using our power and proximity to power to try and change things. We need to break the silence on GBV and amplify the faith voice in addressing GBV. She emphasised that we can no longer be silent as we are called to uphold human dignity.

She gave a brief overview of some admissions made in the policy briefs:

- **Teachings and practices:** We admit that people of faith have often used sacred texts narrowly to encourage destructive social systems and abuses
- **Silence and secrecy:** As communities of faith, we have nurtured a culture of silence and secrecy about gender-based violence.
- **Taboo and Ungodly:** We view any topic related to sex and sexuality as being taboo, ungodly
- **We are called to stand with the poor and marginalised:** We have not been visible in the frontlines as is demanded of us by our faith.
- **Brother's keeper:** We have not been safe spaces for women and girls

Zanele listed five necessary steps mentioned in the Policy Brief as key to faith communities engaging meaningfully around GBV:

- Deepen and popularise the concept that **all human beings are created equal**.
- **Resist domination and power with creativity and courage** – including revisiting our sacred texts and challenging unjust institutional structures.
- **Promote mutual learning** between religions, denominations and different contexts.
- **Promote interaction with organisations addressing GBV** – we cannot go it alone, as different sectors offer different types of support.
- **Support research and documentation** of faith-based responses to gender-based violence.

She ended by saying that our voice as a faith community is critical to effective and holistic responses to GBV. Silence and cautious responses to issues of GBV are no longer an option. We need to explore new liberatory interpretations of our sacred texts that will promote the health and well-being of all.

Using the Policy Briefs for Internal Advocacy: A Good Practice Example. Hope Dunira, the Apostolic Women Empowerment Trust (AWET), Zimbabwe, Head of Programmes

Download presentation [here](#).

Hope described her work as part of AWET. There are many strict doctrines in this group of many related organisations. AWET has been using the three Southern African Policy Briefs, including the GBV one summarised by Zanele, as an advocacy tool in their church. They have used them to engage with 45 Apostolic groups to encourage them to adopt policies on important issues, like changing the way people view women and understanding patriarchy and empowering women in these churches. The organisation has also been engaging with men in Apostolic communities on issues like GBV, sexual reproductive health and rights and teenage pregnancy, based on the other two policy briefs. AWET has also created safe spaces where women and adolescent girls can discuss critical issues. Part of this involves mobilising champions to speak out on the effects of child marriage within the Apostolic community as it is a significant issue.

Their vision is to see empowered women and adolescent girls who actively participate in social and economic development processes that will enable them to advance their rights and those of others. It includes working with men and boys as this is key to creating change.

Shamiso Chigorimbo, Gender Equality Development Worker and Researcher. (Gender, GBV and Migration)

Shamiso pointed out that CSOs have started to work with faith-based organisations, and even though there are many disagreements, one thing that all can agree on is that the high numbers of GBV need to change.

She emphasised that we need to take the things that we agree with in terms of the policy briefs and move forward from here. We are creating a precedent for practice moving forward.

Group Discussion:

Small groups were asked to answer just one question:

What are our points of agreement?

What We Agree On

Participants broke up into groups and then identified points that everyone agreed on. These were then stuck up on the wall. Similar issues were grouped together, and then common items were agreed on. These included:

- **Gender-based violence, and any violence, is unacceptable.**

- Moving forward, we need to make sure to **recognise the multiple forms of GBV**, including child molestation, human trafficking etc.
- **Bottom-up action/activism is vital**. Leaders in churches might be conservative. We need to speak out now, and create a groundswell – there is power in the minority voice.
- **Support leaders who are speaking up**. We can't leave them to take on this task themselves. We need to show our support.
- **Raise women's voices**. Challenge women to advocate, mediate, intervene and question, and not rely on men to speak on their behalf. Some women are actively protecting patriarchy/patriarchal systems. We need to encourage women to speak out even against those women that support patriarchy.
- **Involving men and boys is essential**. We need to create safe spaces for boys and men, alongside women and girls, to talk and learn in churches.
- **We are all equal** (as human beings, as men and women) no one is better than anyone else. We need to normalise the term 'ubuntu'. No one should be excluded from participating in faith-based organisations or their religious practices for any reason (this is usually rooted in patriarchal belief systems).
- **God is multi-faceted, and we are all made in God's image**. We need to worship God as a whole – not male or female – and then patriarchy will lose its power and fall away.
- **GBV is multi-layered** – impacts women, children, disabled, LGBTQI+ community. We have to be aware of all the different levels and how they come together to paint a bigger picture.
- **Working together is key**. This involves teaming up with other groups and sharing resources, insights, ideas, and working together where possible, and including civil society - to ensure continuity of care and avoid contradictory messaging.
- **Learning from each other is vital to grow**. Mutual teaching, learning and sharing are essential. This learning also involves re-looking at the Scriptures. There are different forms of interpretation, and we must be open to various types of wisdom and understanding.
- **Documenting the process so that it can be shared**. We need to ensure that we do research and also document our work so that we capture this process. This should be participatory research, captured from storytelling and sharing experiences, not top-down research that undermines the agency of people.

Song

The Phephisa Survivors' Movement sang a song, called "They said wait". It was a moving piece that ended in a powerful phrase:

"With all the pain, and shame and anger, I survived!"

Greeting by Sherry Zalika Sykes, the United States Consul General for KwaZulu-Natal. She started by emphasising that what is happening today, and this meeting is critical, and it matters. She said that there must be people in the world, looking to change things from what they are, to where they want them to be.

She gave some background to her role, that involves being an intermediary between the US, officially, and the people and organisations in KZN. She encouraged people to look at their Facebook page for opportunities, as there are often exchanges or other exciting opportunities: [US Embassy South Africa](#). She encouraged especially young people (under 40) who will be future leaders to introduce themselves to her offices, as this is not by application but by recommendation from the Consulate General's office.

Focusing on the purpose of the day, Sherry reminded participants that they are gathered to find solutions and create change. She emphasised the pervasiveness of GBV and stated that engaging men and boys is critical to creating change. While it is vital to combat individual instances of GBV, we also need to recognise the structural and systemic forms of GBV and violence – such as poverty. She ended by saying that she supports the South African government's efforts and those here who will start to implement plans and try to create change.

SESSION 2:

The National Gender-Based Violence & Femicide Strategic Plan 2020 – 2030:
"Healing, Safety, Freedom & Equality in our Lifetime."

The NSP and Emergency Response Action Plan – Where is the Faith Sector? Ms Cookie Edwards, Member of the Presidential NSP Steering Committee; Coordinator KZN Network on Violence Against Women (KZNVAV)

The full presentation is available [here](#).

Cookie gave some background to the National Strategic Plan (NSP) and the Emergency Response Action Plan (ERAP). The ERAP is the first concrete planning tool as the team is still preparing the full NSP. She explained that the #Total Shutdown March led to the handing over of a memorandum to

the president, Cyril Ramaphosa, that had 24 demands. A declaration was developed from this, and from this, the National Strategic Plan (still under review) was developed.

In August 2019, 63 women and girls were murdered – during Women’s Month- and there was a public outcry. The Emergency Response Action Plan (ERAP) was developed from the recognition that this is an emergency and the desire to start attempting to change things immediately. Government and civil society have worked hard at treatment, care and support, although a lot of improvement is needed. But not enough is done around prevention. There needs to be a solid prevention strategy in place. An emergency budget was put together for R1.6billion to ensure that Government departments implement more programmes on prevention.

An interim committee of CSOs and government meet monthly, and some concrete plans are in place. Although it is not visible yet, things are starting to happen. All departments need to send weekly reports (by Thursday at 4 pm) to the President and accountability is increasing for change to occur. Overarching strategies include:

- Strengthened state and societal accountability at all levels driven by leadership and high-level political commitment
- A national drive towards facilitating healing and rebuilding the social fabric
- Locating a response towards GBV as integral to responding to violence, poverty and inequality
- Widening the lens, deepening the understanding, working together and rooting the response in communities

She added that when thinking about GBV, we need to address the structural drivers, and any response should take these into account. Structural drivers include:

- Brutal and deeply dehumanising history
- Acceptability of violence overall
- Harmful social norms
- Ideologies that marginalise and oppress
- Inadequate linkages made between violence against women and violence against children
- Lack of positive social cohesion
- Poverty and inequality.

She stated that although faith-based organisation (FBOs) are not places that encourage activism around GBV, they have a crucial role to play. People need to know about GBV because it is real – it happens even inside faith communities. Inanda has the highest stats for sexual violence in the

country, and the second highest in KZN is uMlazi. She emphasised that for those who were attending the event from Durban, these are our neighbours.

Cookie reminded participants of the need to look at programmes of FBOs and aligning these with the NSP – there are opportunities for funding. She encouraged everyone to apply. She recommended that all FBOs run programmes in their communities that start creating change on the ground.

She also recommended working together as much as possible, as when organisations operate in isolation, it is hard to get an idea overall of what has happened, and the scope of the violence, as well as the programmes/responses that are happening

Cookie ended by saying that the Department of Justice has a meeting on 11 March and they are inviting people, so she encouraged everyone to attend this.

Group Discussion:

Participants came together in buzz groups, this time to discuss the following two questions:

- *What can the religious sector offer that is unique and critical to the success of the NSP and ERAP?*
- *What will it take for the religious sector to contribute effectively to ending GBV and mitigate its current impact in South Africa?*

What the Religious Sector can Offer, and What We need to Do to Achieve Impact:

ACKNOWLEDGE OUR GUILT:

- We need to start by repenting – we have abdicated our duty to care for all of God’s creatures by ignoring survivors of GBV. We can start by acknowledging this.
- Change the language that we use and stop whitewashing it - GBV is a sin. All churches need to agree that GBV (and in fact all forms of violence) are a sin.

GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IS A SIN

EXAMINE OUR TEACHINGS, REVISIT OUR SACRED TEXTS:

- Historically, some churches in South Africa developed a ‘liberation theology’. This contributed a lot to the changes that took place in terms of apartheid. This should be

applied now. Or something similar – a contextual theology that is relevant to today’s context.

LISTEN:

- Engage with women’s experiences, particularly survivors, let them raise their voices and hear their wisdom

SPEAK OUT:

- The religious sector is an expert when it comes to changing people’s mindsets through conversion to our religions. We should apply the same evangelism to change people’s views on GBV.
- Preach openly against GBV and using the Scriptures positively to change mindsets from patriarchal views can do a lot
- The church has a lot of resources and can provide spaces to start dialogues on GBV, and host meetings, including survivor support groups
- We need to participate in the political discussions in the public realm related to GBV as leaders/as the church

BE TRANSPARENT

- Church policies should be open and available for people to read and to understand.

BE ACCOUNTABLE

- We need to hold each other accountable – if the whole FB sector is working together, and holding each other accountable; we will become a force.

COLLABORATE

- Do away with the boundaries between FBOs and CSOs to focus on GBV as the issue
- We need a compact – a clear, united agreement
- Church has resources – like buildings – that can be opened to organisations/support groups
- We need to meet more regularly as those present here - to learn from each other and strategise together.

Looking forward

Reference Group

Participants recognised that there needs to be a sense of coherence and for people to work together and decided that it is essential to establish a reference group that takes forward these issues/suggestions.

The goal is to speak with a more unified voice as the faith sector so that the government knows how to speak to us and relate to us. The Reference Group members are to share the outcomes of today's meeting with others in their circle of influence, and work towards a more united voice of people of faith in South Africa, and for us as faith-based organisations to respond in a unified way.

When government gets to the point of putting in place its GBV NSP structures at national, provincial, district and local levels, and asks for faith sector reps, we need to be ready and respond with a coherent voice: 'we want to be involved'.

The first step is to start making the group more visible by releasing a joint statement of commitment from this event on the group's views of GBV. Next, a letter will be written to the Interim NSC to express our desire to contribute meaningfully to the goals of the faith-based sector when it comes to GBV.

Lyn asked the group to please think about how we refer to and what we call this group of concerned faith representatives, as we can't claim to represent all faith-based organisations. Participants agreed that we need to be clear about this, to avoid any sense that we are trying to dominate the space. We need to make it clear that we are inviting faith actors to join hands to find a way together to have a positive impact.

Volunteers to be part of this group include:

- Daniela Gennrich (WWSOSA)
- Lesego Temane (ELCSA, UKZN)
- Maggie Phore (Salvation Army)
- Ntwenhle Majozi (NGO, PACSA)
- Menelise Dladla (Anglican)
- Dudu Radebe (Individual, ACT Ubumbano Gender Task Team)
- Abongile Matjila (Individual, UKZN)
- Gil Harper (SA YMCA)
- Bongiwe Shoji (Life Restoration)
- Nobuntu Modulse (MCSA Manyano)
- Lebo Matela (FOCCISA)

The first meeting will be held in the next month.

Religious Sector Training Programme and Community of Learning

Daniela highlighted key points for this proposed process through which a cohort of faith leaders will be accompanied as they address SGBV and its key drivers in their congregations, reject survivor stigma, offer vital survivor services, and engage in joint initiatives with other community stakeholders. This involves a bottom-up approach of thinking of our experiences as activists and leaders in the faith sector, to try to inspire more activists and take steps to transform our faith communities to be able to make a meaningful contribution to ending GBV.

Members:

- Representative (World Vision International)
- Johan Botha (NG Kerk)
- Themba Khanyile (Faith Care Community)
- Daniela Gennrich (WWSOSA)
- Charlene van der Walt (and other?) UKZN (G&R)
- Siya Tonono (MCSA)
- Sandile Ngiba (ELCSA)
- Representative (ELSCA-DS)

* WWSOSA Coordination Hub will coordinate both these teams, at least at the outset.

Final Comments from the Floor

Most comments have been incorporated into the relevant sections.

One issue that needs further attention is the issue of language at events like this. Although the programme director had invited people to speak in any language, the meeting was conducted in English. Unfortunately, the organisation doesn't have the resources to make it a bilingual/multilingual event. Since people came from various provinces, it would not be possible to translate into many languages, for reasons of time. The organisation emphasised that if participants wanted to speak in their own language, they should do so, and people should try and sit with someone who could assist with translation for the larger group.

Another issue that came up is that there is often a large gap between policy and practice. We need to start closing this gap. This gathering is a start, but how we will take this forward will be key.

Vote of Thanks

Lyn van Rooyen thanked everyone for participating – all the speakers, Daniela, and everyone who came, particularly people who came from across the country.

She expressed her firm belief that we have to make a difference. We have no choice. The God of love, compassion and justice compels us. She reminded everyone to sign up and become an official member – at <http://www.wwsosa.org.za/content/member-registration-and-update>

Evaluation and Closure

Daniela encouraged all to email feedback on the conference, suggestions to improve future conferences and how to grow our collaboration together.

Daniela also committed to communicating with all participants in the next few weeks, to begin the process of putting the outcomes of the conference into action.

The event was closed with a prayer.