

KEY NOTE ADDRESS
MEC FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF TRANSPORT, COMMUNITY SAFETY AND
LIAISON: MR. T.W. MCHUNU
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SYMPOSIUM ON VICTIM EMPOWERMENT
ETHEKWINI METRO

Programme Director

Head, management and staff of Department for Community Safety and Liaison

Colleagues from non-governmental organizations

Colleagues from other government departments

Traditional leaders

Religious leaders

Our honorable dignitaries

Ladies and gentlemen

I greet you all

WE thank you for joining us in this important gathering today. This Symposium on Crime Victim Empowerment is the second gathering of this nature to be held at provincial level in KwaZulu-Natal. The first similar provincial initiative of this nature took place on the 21st of January this year, and was graced by none other than our own Premier, Dr Zweli Mkhize, who highlighted the need to tackle the challenge of crime which is a product of our country's history of apartheid and separate development that saw many black people ending up leading miserable lives as poor and unemployed victims of violent crimes and dysfunctional family life.

We are glad that you are here to team up with my Department in facing a very sensitive matter, particularly because the crimes that happen against the victims often take place within the family which is supposed to be a primary institution in creating, building and nurturing a person. We are here because we want to see happy families that produce happy people that will make a positive contribution towards society.

As they say, “Happy families make a happy society, a happy society make a happy nation and happy nations make a happy world.” We want to get to that ideal. But we still have a long way to go, and such gatherings which seek to chart the way forward that will take us to that ideal affirm our commitment and resolve to get there.

We will get there. It is a question of time. It is such gatherings that must tell us how to get there quickly, faster and smarter. It should not be a question of if we can get there, but rather when will we get there – how soon do we achieve the desired end result? We can no longer keep lamenting about our pitiable plight of a society that has crime victims, but we must be seen to be proactive in finding and implementing methods to rid our society of this cancer.

So I am glad to be a part of decision-makers and think-tank in you, you who are expected to shape and influence the future of our society to become a healthier and nicer for our children and their grandchildren. But presently, the situation does not look good and it begs for good minds that converge here to spell out what must be done to intensify the fight against crime, especially the crimes that happen within the home.

We know that many victims suffer in silence. What are we doing to break the silence and to get them to speak out so that action can be taken against perpetrators? We know that the victims of crime tend to develop thick skins and persevere even when they are aware that their lives are in danger. They become stuck in a situation from which they can and should run away from sooner than later. Yet, running away from difficult situations is not as easy as we think it is.

There are so many reasons that compel the victim to stay in undesirable and unhealthy relationships. Some victims cannot run away because the perpetrator is a bread-winner and the victim is unable to take care of themselves if they are dependent women or children.

Some victims cannot get away because they are afraid of being called failures after failed marriages, especially the women victims. The way in which the women are treated by their families, relatives, the church and community after divorce is the very reason that makes them to stay in marriages that are not fulfilling and dangerous to them, and which ultimately lead to their death. Yet other victims are hiding the fact that they are victims because they do not want to expose the problems within their relationships or marriages, let alone telling the world that their spouses are abusive.

For example, a rich men would be so over-protective of their wives or partners, do everything for them, buy them the most expensive clothing, cars and jewellery, take them to expensive salons and make sure that they have enough cash to take care of small things in the house, but refuse them an opportunity to work and be exposed to other people.

The most disempowering and psychologically devastating circumstance is for a victim to be trapped in a situation where the victim cannot share her pain with other people. We have come across victims, particularly women, who testify that their men have ordered them to make a bed and food for the husband and his girlfriends that he brings home. Gross as it may sound, but it happens.

Some women report that the world may think they are in an ideal relationship whilst the wife is sleeping in the children's bedroom because she is being physically, psychologically and emotionally abused on a regular basis. The following day, the abusive husband gives her money to go to a beauty salon to apply facials so that no one can notice the bruises or marks on her battered face.

The poor woman cannot leave such a luxurious life because she is used to it and cannot expose the partner's sick conduct. Some are not even aware that they are victims. They have become so accustomed to the situation such that if a person were to tell them that they are being abused, they would run to the perpetrator and report that someone is trying to create a problem in their relationship or marriage.

Victims of crime include people who have been raped, kidnapped, hijacked, attacked, assaulted, dispossessed of their belongings, etc.

Gays, Lesbians and the prostitutes are amongst the most vulnerable groups. Some of these people end up having their human rights violated because the community and some of their family members end up not accepting them as part of the community. They are being sexually, emotionally and physically abused because of their different life-style. Some get killed because of their sexual orientation and for being sex workers.

We have in other areas within the province heard of situations where the Metro and SAPS officers have assaulted and robbed the prostitutes for being prostitutes. They have been dispossessed of their electrical appliances and expensive belongings where they do not have money to bribe the police not to take them to arrest them when found as sex workers in the streets at night. These are also victims of violence and they also need to be protected since our country has a democracy where everyone has rights.

We all know that most of the time victims are generally women but that does not mean that only women are victims. There are men who are also victims but it seems that some are not as bold as women to come out and report that they are victims of abuse by their partners. Some have come out but there is still a long way to go in encouraging men to report cases.

The fact that men are not reporting does not give us a clear picture of what is happening in our communities. Some men say that they were brought up and taught not to cry even if they cannot take it anymore because if a men cries, he is called a sissy.

Not crying out may result to someone bottling up the anger inside them. This may be a sure recipe for an outburst which may end up with the victim losing control and killing or injuring or causing bodily harm to everyone at home, or workplace and ultimately themselves. It is very important that we conduct workshops where men are encouraged to talk to someone who can listen to them and deal with whatever troubles them before they can be dangerous to themselves and to others around them.

The role of the church must be recognized as some of these men are members of the church and the church has to be sincere and approachable in this regard. We are very much aware that at times men do want to report cases of abuse to the police but they do not have the guts as they become a laughing stock for the police when they report that they are being abused by their wives and partners.

As a Department that is an oversight to the police (SAPS), we have taken it upon our shoulders to train the police on how to handle the victims when they come to report cases of abuse at the police station. This will assist so that men can also feel free to report when they are being abused.

We have also ensured that at all police stations within the Province, there is a Victim Friendly Facility (formerly known as the trauma centre) where cases of abuse can be treated in privacy and where the victim will feel that his or her case is treated with strict confidentiality. This means that when a victim arrives at a police station to report a rape case, for instance, she cannot be forced to talk about the ordeal at an open place such as the Community Service Centre (CSC) but should rather ask that she be assisted at the Victim Friendly Facility by a trained police officer, preferably a woman officer in case it is a female that is reporting the case. We are however aware that some police stations are still struggling to put up such victim-friendly facilities. Counseling also has to be provided by a trained counselor who is in a position to assist the victim throughout the process.

We also need to take into serious consideration the cultures and or customs that are demeaning and belittling to us as a nation. I am referring here to the culture of *ukuthwalwa kwezintombi* where young girl children are forcefully taken from one family or neighborhood to another to be married, whether they like the man or not. In most cases these children are made to marry men that are three or four times older than the girl. Some of these elderly men are even widowed and no one knows if they have diseases that they can transmit to the young girls or not. With the HIV and AIDS pandemic taking its toll, it is very important for us as a nation that we stand together and that our customs are not counter-productive and destructive in so far as the modern context is concerned. As a government, traditional leaders and civil society, let us hold each others' hands for the sake of our children.

Other people are not aware that rape does take place even in a marriage. It should be clear that some people are raped day in and day out by their partners and they are not aware that they are being raped because they think even if they do not give consent to sex, that their partners are entitled to having sex with them. That is not the case and it is up to us to educate people about their rights even if they are married.

The bottom line is that men do not have a right to see women as punch bags, or sex objects. If a woman says no to sex men have to understand that she is saying a big and bold **NO**. Men have to start seeing women as people with integrity, people who are talented in various ways, who are capable of doing things that were once thought to be a preserve for men.

We have heard of cases of children who have been raped by people that are known to them and are close to them such as fathers, uncles, grand fathers and neighbours. Most of these cases are sometimes reported to the police and the perpetrator gets arrested but the case later gets withdrawn because there is lack of evidence or parents have negotiated with the perpetrator to pay for the damages in a form of cash or goat (ingezamuzi).

At times the parents, especially the mother of a raped child may not want the case to be opened or withdraws it because the perpetrator is the breadwinner. This leads to a situation where the victim's rights are violated.

We need to protect such vulnerable children, even if it means removing the child to a place of safety, for the safety of the child. Victims need to understand the fact that it may be better to go hungry for a while whilst you are looking for an alternative income rather than fail to expose a perpetrator in the interest of the safety of children. It is not only girl children are at risk but also boys – they are all exposed to potential sexual violence and rape in their environments.

To respond to this challenge, the Department of Community Safety and Liaison came up with a programme called "*Operation Khuz'umhlola*". This program seeks to revive ethical and moral values that can help to sustain human life in a healthy and acceptable manner. In my very first budget speech as MEC for Community Safety & Liaison, I stated in the provincial legislature that Khu'zumhlola is my Department's flagship Victim Empowerment Programme. This programme is designed to educate our women, children, youth, disabled and the elderly on their rights to safety and protection. It is also intended to prevent would-be violators through educating them of the consequences and damage of their violent actions.

We have partnered with the SAPS "Men for Change" project to also reach out to men on conflict management and the protection of vulnerable groups. Contact crimes are high and these crimes are mostly generated through inter-personal interaction at home. What is often forgotten is that the police can only attend to sensitive crimes of this nature, once the crime has been reported.

The duty to prevent such crimes from being carried out lies with the community, the family and with the individual. If you choose to beat up a woman, then you can't blame the police for that crime. The role of the police is to give the best support possible to the victim throughout the attempt to bring the offender to book.

These crimes can only be reduced through our own individual and collective efforts. We will continue as a department to deliver on the success of our school safety campaign, promoting the Victim's Charter among the police and keeping our Widows and Elderly networks going through our various projects. Our department continue to work closely with the Departments of Health, Education and Office of the Premier to generate the protection of human rights.

With the soccer World Cup coming to our Country from June 11 to July 11, 2010, we need to take care of our children as they are at risk of disappearing with strangers for good and be used as sex slaves or end up with body parts that are cut and sold to be used as muti.

So this symposium gives me and my Department hope as I see amongst you experts from various sectors in the victim empowerment field. This means that this gathering will pave a way forward since by the end of this exercise we wish to know who will be doing what to achieve a crime-free society that will not have victims to worry about in the first place.

It is also the intention of my department that we create a reliable electronic database of services to victims within the Province of KwaZulu-Natal. We hope that an updated database of services will assist all of us as service providers to know what to do or where to refer a victim that requires a certain service within the Province.

The database has to have all services including among others the following:-

- Police stations
- Police stations with Victim Friendly Facilities
- NGO run Victim Friendly Facilities / Victim Support Centres
- NGOs dealing with Victim Empowerment Services
- Hospitals (Private and State owned)

- Clinics (Private and State owned)
- Shelters for the Abused women, men and children
- Places of Safety
- Children's Homes
- Reformatory schools
- Government Departments
- Chapter nine Institutions

Categories in the database should include among others the following:-

- Name of Institution
- Contact number, e-mail address
- Physical Address
- District / local municipality
- Type of Service & period

We however depend on you for information to be entered into the database as we are not aware of all the services that are in existence in the province. The proposed database will be updated on a continuous basis as we need to have reliable information at all times.

Hopefully the discussions we are going to have today will be of high quality with resolutions that can be implemented.

I thank you all.