

**ADDRESS BY COUNCILLOR RETIEF ODENDAAL
THE HONOURABLE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF THE NELSON MANDELA BAY
MUNICIPALITY
TO: RAPE CRISES CENTRE (RCC) 30TH ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER
SATURDAY, 10 DECEMBER 2022, EAST CAPE TRAINING CENTRE AT 18H00**

Programme Director

- *Ms Berenice Jacobs: Director of RCC*
- *Board Members of RCC*
- *All Social Partners & Stakeholders*
- *Distinguished Guests*
- *Members of the Media*
- *Ladies and Gentlemen*

Good Evening! Malibongwe!

It is my singular honour and privilege to be with you this evening to mark 30 years of outstanding work by the Rape Crises Centre (RCC) in the Nelson Mandela Bay, its staff and by its volunteers.

Yes, the RCC has been in the frontline as a first responder in countless cases, working to educate and prevent harm and heal the deep wounds of trauma – doing what everyone needs to be doing: listening, believing, and supporting people who have experienced sexual assault, rape, or childhood sexual abuse.

The Nelson Mandela Bay of today is a very different city from 1992 when the RCC was founded. We are a more open and tolerant, we are more willing to listen to often unpalatable truth and not to sweep it under the carpet. Undoubtedly, the RCC has played an invaluable part in shaping our city in which we live today.

However, although we have become more open and tolerant, we must own up to the fact that women still experience physical and/or sexual violence at an alarming rate. This negative trend is reflected in recent statistics and studies. Sexual violence remains far too hidden and underreported and any figure we put forward will underestimate its prevalence. Sexual violence against boys and men is possibly even more underreported due to stigma, humiliation, and power dynamics.

Violence against women and children has reached discerning proportions. South Africa has the highest statistics for violence against women in the world, for a country not at war. It is estimated that one in every three women will be raped in her lifetime. This means that more than 1000 women are raped daily in South Africa. Save our Children SA cited horrendous cases of child abuse, mostly girls, are reported every day. In addition, only a negligible percentage of reported rape cases get to court and of these about a third are successfully prosecuted.

Child protection is something we cannot take lightly it needs our dedicated attention and focus; we need to:

- Highlight the plight of children, especially those who are abused and neglected, children who are affected and infected with HIV and AIDS; children living in poverty; children with disabilities; and those in conflict with law

- Enhance access of children to the various government services.
- Enhance partnerships with various stakeholders and communities to build a better life for children.
- Strengthen families and enhance the values of love, care, and support for children
- Strengthen the Moral Regeneration Movement (MRM)

Sexual abuse is most prevalent in black communities with the most vulnerable group falling within the 7 – 13-year age group. Of all sexually abused children 21% are male and 79% female.

Statistics have shown that neglect and physical abuse remains more prevalent in the coloured communities, and that sexual and emotional abuse is by far the highest form of abuse in the black communities.

Considering all the forms of abuse it is obvious that the age group, which is at greatest risk at present, is the 7 – 13-year-old group. Also of grave concern is the emotional abuse imposed on the 0 – 2-year-old group.

The latest police figures show that 10 818 rape cases were reported in the first quarter of 2022. South Africa has among the highest rape incidence in the world. We must never forget that behind each statistic there is a human being, a family, and friends. It is crucial that we listen, we believe, and we support. In many victims' testimonies, all too often we hear that the way the assault is dealt with by the authorities can cause further trauma and violation.

I am of the view that it is important to first understand the causes of GBV – with a focus on sexual violence – globally and in South Africa. There are many contested theories. It is, therefore, hard to find suitable common ground for interventions to reduce violence.

To make matters worse, Police training on GBV is limited. The establishment of the National Council on GBV, the central agency that is supposed to coordinate official responses, has been stalled since 2012. South Africa has an impressive 46% women's representation in parliament. But these women have not spearheaded policy against GBV. Instead, the government was forced to draw up a National Strategic Plan on GBV & F by the #TotalShutdown movement in 2018.

In South Africa we had one of the best national gender machineries globally. It had structures in the legislature such as the Joint Monitoring Committee on the Quality of Life and the Status of Women, the Multiparty Women's Caucus, and the Commission for Gender Equality. Most of these structures were dismantled and replaced with a dysfunctional Ministry for Women, Youth and People with Disabilities that is supposed to initiate interventions on GBV

Sexual violence is a serious public health and human rights issue. The impact it has on people affected and those close to them can be devastating. So too can complacency around a narrative which demeans women. It is not normal to make remarks about sexually predatory behaviour; to make shameful comments about women's bodies; to disrespect women's intellect and ambitions; to dismiss such remarks as just shop talk.

This creates a chilling culture that we thought was ancient history. It insults our most basic values as individuals, values enshrined in our Bill of Rights – equality, justice, and dignity. The human rights of women and girls in the NMB are a central priority for the incumbent coalition government. Promoting the human rights of women and girls must always inform and inspire our policies and actions. We do this not only because it is the right thing, but because no forward-looking city can truly prosper if it stifles the potential of its women and girls and deprives itself of the contributions of more than half our population.

We must keep up the momentum. We have a unique opportunity to reenergize our communities, breath new life into the gender equality agenda and sustain and amplify the gains made over the last 30 years by the RCC. We must ready ourselves to do more and to do it better.

Preventing, combatting, and prosecuting all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, including intimate partner violence, harmful practices such as female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriages, as well as conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence, sexual harassment and abuse, online violence and bullying is of the utmost priority to the coalition government and its administration.

The NMBM will continue investing in raising awareness while building more equal, educated, and respectful communities. Ensuring men and boys have an active and meaningful role in supporting behavioral change, addressing discriminatory social norms, and combatting gender stereotypes is fundamental to eliminating gender equality.

Violence must be addressed in all its forms, including online. Technology has the power to connect and empower, but it can also reinforce and normalize gender roles and cultural customs and create new pathways for violence and abuse. The online world is just not a minor image, but a hall of mirrors of the offline world, reflecting and amplifying the positive and negative.

The NMBM is strongly committed to ensuring all survivors are guaranteed access to comprehensive psychological and health care services, as well as justice and reparations. We expect law enforcement agencies to conduct effective investigations of those crimes, to bring perpetrators to justice and to ensure accountability. We must be committed to enforce a prevention-based zero-tolerance policy for all forms of sexual and gender-based violence committed.

As we mark the end of the 16 Days of No Violence Against Women and Children, we must pose uncomfortable questions to ourselves. One of the critical questions is: What are we doing, individually and collectively, to address this scourge that threatens to erode the gains we have been making since 1994 to build a caring society? Beyond adopting the role of critics, what is it that other sectors can do to help government to prevent and eliminate violence against our women and children.

In conclusion, I would like to thank Ms Berenice Jacobs and all staff and volunteers of the RCC for your compassion, courage, and commitment. The work of the RCC is critical for sexual violence prevention. Because of you, more brave survivors are coming forward to tell their stories.

Today that need remains, as rape and sexual violence remains a pandemic. Through its invaluable work, the RCC serves as a model of how to prevent harm and heal trauma. My warm congratulations on an incredible 30 years and my very best wishes for the future work of the Rape Crises Centre.

Wishing you all a joyous and safe festive season.

God Bless.