

Mr. President,

In November 1998, South Africa passed the Domestic Violence Act, which aimed to protect and support victims¹. Despite being amended in 2021, the implementation of this legislation has fallen short of its promises.

Research highlights a troubling truth: that most women survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) in South Africa do not report their experiences. Only one in eight women in Limpopo reported physical abuse² and in Gauteng, a mere 3.9% of women who were victims of rape reported their experiences to the police³.

These distressing statistics reveal the distrust that many GBV survivors hold towards the South African policing and justice systems. Their lack of confidence stems from factors like victim-blaming, insensitive treatment by the police, and low conviction rates. Consequently, many survivors refrain from reporting, which impedes effective GBV justice, accurate statistics of the severity of the issue and future prevention efforts.

Justice Desk Africa, PRATYeK and Edmund Rice International therefore recommend that South Africa:

1. Launches consistent community-based awareness campaigns to educate the public about the provisions of the Domestic Violence Act and its amendments.
2. Ensures that Victim-Friendly Rooms at police stations are staffed by trained stakeholders who are paid, as opposed to relying on volunteers.
3. Ensures a more practice-oriented approach to domestic violence training during the Basic Police Development Learning Programme, which is refreshed annually.
4. Invests in preventative programs targeting the root causes of GBV, including community and school-based initiatives that address gender stereotypes and promote healthy masculinities.

Despite the declaration of femicide made by the President of South Africa as a national emergency in 2019, the question remains: How long must we wait before concrete actions are taken to protect and empower women?

Thank you.

¹ Republic of South Africa, No. 116 of 1998: Domestic Violence Act, 1998.

² Gender Links. "South Africa: The Justice System is Failing Women." November 30, 2015. <https://genderlinks.org.za/programme-web-menu/south-africa-the-justice-system-is-failing-women-2015-11-30/>

³ Gender Links. "South Africa: The Justice System is Failing Women." November 30, 2015.