

CDH SUPPORTS

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM FOR NO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN



“VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN CONCERNS US ALL”

*South Africa has several progressive pieces of legislation aimed at combatting violence against women and children including inter alia the Domestic Violence Act, the S*xual Offences and Related Matters Amendment Act as well as the Children’s Act, all of which guarantee safety and security against violence. In addition, the Constitution guarantees the rights to equality, life, human dignity and freedom and security of the person to all who live in South Africa.*

Notwithstanding legislative intervention, studies have found that at least one in three women will experience s*xual and/or physical abuse at least once in their life. In addition, statistics released by the South African Police Service this year reported that the total number of reported s*xual offences for the year 2017/2018 were recorded at 50,018. Disconcertingly, much of this violence is directed at children. Recent statistics delivered by the Minister of Police revealed that in the last three financial years, 41% of all reported s*xual assaults were perpetrated against children. South African Police Services statistics reveals that at least 46 children are s*xually assaulted in South Africa each day and at least two are murdered daily. As alarming as these statistics are, the precise magnitude of s*xual offences committed in South Africa remains undocumented as s*xual offences are often unreported and/or are not investigated.

Some of the challenges associated with reporting and combatting violence against women and children includes under-resourced police stations, station commanders and general police officers who do not have the requisite

training to deal with domestic and family violence, improper access to water and sanitation facilities, as well as a culture of patriarchy that denies certain persons the right to self-determination and the right of consent.

Legislative intervention is therefore not enough. The daily human rights violations inflicted against women and children reduce the aforementioned legislative protections to mere “paper rights” that are neither accessible nor tangible for those who need them the most. This demands that all institutions and private individuals work together to end the culture of violence.

In solidarity with the International **16 Days of Activism Campaign** to combat violence against women and children, held annually between 25 November and 10 December, the Pro Bono & Human Rights Practice hosted a firm-wide **16 Days of Activism campaign** to address the issue of violence against women and children, and more broadly gender-based violence. The Centre for the Study of Violence defines gender-based violence as a term used to define “violence that occurs as a result of the

normative role expectations associated with each gender, as well as the unequal power relationships between the genders within the context of a specific society”.

The CDH **16 Days of Activism Campaign** slogan was “We believe you. We will not blame you”. The purpose of the slogan was to create a safe space in which survivors of abuse can come forward with their experiences, without the fear of being blamed for the violence or the fear that their experiences would be dismissed or trivialised. The slogan was also directed at changing the culture of survivor blaming and the re-traumatisation of survivors who come forward. Studies have found that the invalidation and trivialisation of the experiences of survivors of abuse exacerbate the impact of the abuse and is often used as a strategy to ensure that survivors of violence remain silent and compliant. The invalidation and trivialisation of the experiences of survivors of abuse perpetuates gender inequality by denying survivors their experiences, and in turn, access to the emotional and other support necessary.

The purpose of the CDH **16 Days of Activism Campaign** was to create constructive discourse within our firm and in our individual communities about the daily human rights violations occurring as a result of s*xual violence. The **16 Days of Activism Campaign** sought to encourage members of our firm to contribute to, and participate in, initiatives aimed at combatting gender-based and s*xual violence.

During the campaign, the Pro Bono & Human Rights Practice (the Pro Bono Practice) hosted a panel discussion with members from various institutions including, Sonke Gender Justice, Rape Crisis South Africa, the Saartjie Baartman Centre and the Institute of Security Studies. The panel discussed “Why allegations of s*xual violence are often not reported, when reported, survivors are often not believed and the manner in which state institutions, private intuitions and the broader civil society can create safe spaces for survivors to come forward”.

The panel discussion was aimed at addressing survivor-blaming and creating an environment where survivors of violence are encouraged to share their experiences without the fear of being re-traumatised or blamed for the violence inflicted upon them.

As part of the campaign’s aim to empower survivors of abuse, the Pro Bono Practice also hosted a basic self-defence sensitivity training session to assist members of our staff with some practical tools to deal with dangerous situations. The purpose of the training was to both empower members of our staff but also to create awareness around potentially dangerous situations.

The Pro Bono Practice is also committed to creating meaningful partnerships and networks of people and organisations that work together, rather than dividing efforts. As part of an initiative to contribute to the existing work in the area of gender-based violence, the Pro Bono Practice in partnership with Rape Crisis South Africa, collected contributions by members of CDH which were donated to Rape Crisis South Africa to fund a counselling session for a survivor of abuse. Thank you to all who participated in the campaign and made donations.

As Kofi Anan said: “Violence against women [and children] is perhaps the most shameful human rights violation, and it is perhaps the most pervasive. It knows no boundaries, geography, culture or wealth. As long as it continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.”. The magnitude of the violence in our society demands that everyone act to create a society free from violence. It is therefore imperative that both public and private institutions, and indeed all members of society, take a stand against s*xual violence in order for us to ensure that both public and private spaces are safe for all who live in our country.

#HearMeToo: End Violence Against Women and Children.

We believe you. We will not blame you.

Riola Kok, overseen by Jacquie Cassette.

Due to the title of our guideline, spam-filters may block this email, misidentifying it as explicit material. To avoid this, we have inserted an asterisk.

