

4 SEPTEMBER 2019

# PRO BONO & HUMAN RIGHTS ALERT

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### Empowering women through law

On 24 August, CDH's Pro Bono & Human Rights Practice (the Practice) was invited to participate in the Daily Voice's Annual Diamonds and Divas Women's Month event held at the GrandWest Market Hall. Aside from entertainment, glamour and an all-round celebration of the strength, resilience and incredible power of women, this ladies-only event focused on women empowering themselves and each other financially, legally and otherwise through cooperation, support and the sharing of knowledge. More than that, it was about starting and maintaining a necessary conversation about empowerment.

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CLIFFE DEKKER HOFMEYR

## Empowering women through law

The audience was encouraged to further empower themselves by attending some of the free legal workshops and seminars hosted by CDH in the greater Cape Town area, which aim to equip attendees with a better understanding of how the law protects them and to provide them with the necessary tools, contact information and steps to follow before legal difficulty arises.

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The Practice's Brigitta Mangale was allocated a spot in the event program to address the impassioned crowd. She spoke briefly about the history of why it is we celebrate Women's Day, how it is the powerful group called women can and must empower themselves through law and how women are Constitutionally protected. She also elaborated on the content of women's rights in general and explained some of the pro bono and human rights work CDH is doing in communities across the Western Cape to understand and respond to the needs of our communities. The audience was encouraged to further empower themselves by attending some of the free legal workshops and seminars hosted by CDH in the greater Cape Town area, which aim to equip attendees with a better

understanding of how the law protects them and to provide them with the necessary tools, contact information and steps to follow before legal difficulty arises.

One of the key takeaways was that "when you know better, you do better". In this light, Brigitta ended off her speech with some general advice on what one should do when one faces a legal difficulty. This included to not sit idly, delay or allow oneself to become overwhelmed by the complexity of issues, but rather to take proactive steps towards determining whether a matter is of a criminal or civil nature and how to approach the SAPS and/or find the appropriate legal practitioner to assist.

Throughout the event, CDH hosted a stand on the event floor where members of the audience were invited to chat with Brigitta about their legal issues, receive direction and obtain brief legal guidance. While the focus of the event may not have been legal in nature, it became readily apparent how prevalent a lack of legal knowledge is among non-legally orientated women, and how important it is for lawyers to become more readily involved in such initiatives, to impart the skills that lawyers sometimes take for granted, which are in fact intended to be for the benefit of our society.

Like the more than 20,000 women who marched to the Union Buildings on the 9 August 1956 in protest against the extension of Pass Laws to women, each and every person has a responsibility

## Empowering women through law...*continued*

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While we are aware that we cannot solve all the problems our society faces, we at CDH do not see that as an excuse to shy away from our duties and have committed to playing our part as a matter of firm culture rather than mere lip service.

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to champion gender equality by all means. For the Practice, this meant engaging in the process of helping the women in attendance to build critical analytical skills in the area of law and to gain the self-confidence to take control of their lives. The importance of the empowerment of women through legal education cannot be overstated and is an essential process in the transformation of gender relations as it addresses the structural and underlying causes of subordination and discrimination.

As part of the event goodie bag, the Practice provided the audience with an emergency contact details card which provided details of civil, criminal, and pro bono and human rights structures to be contacted.

CDH recognises the importance of large law firms such as ours becoming actively involved in the growth and development of South Africa at all levels of society and at both the top and ground levels of the economy. While commercially focused, we are not divorced from the challenges our society faces, and it is incumbent upon us to meaningfully engage with our society and drive transformation in any way we can. While we are aware that we cannot solve all the problems our society faces, we at CDH do not see that as an excuse to shy away from our duties and have committed to playing our part as a matter of firm culture rather than mere lip service. In this light, we are grateful for the opportunity to play a role in this event and look forward to participating in more initiatives like this going forward.

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*Brigitta Mangale*



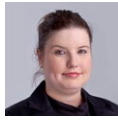
Brigitta Mangale discussing women empowerment through law on behalf of the CDH Pro Bono & Human Rights Practice.

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