



**NUMSA is deeply concerned about the safety of Women and Children as we mark 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence
2 December 2024
Press statement**

The National Union of Metalworkers of South Africa (NUMSA) has noted with dismay that a shocking 2500 women and children are murdered every day. These figures were released by the South African Police Services (SAPS) when they released their crime statistics, for the period April to September this year. This means that at least 14 women and children have been killed in that period each day.

It is very sad that the announcement was made during the same week that we mark 16 Days of Activism against Gender Based Violence, which takes place from the 25th of November to the 10th of December. During this period the whole country shines a spotlight on Gender Based Violence to highlight this scourge which is destroying our society.

According to the Medical Research Council during the period of 2020/2021, it was found that 60% of women who were murdered were killed by their intimate partners, with one in six women killed, displaying signs of sexual violation.

Women and children who are the most vulnerable sectors of our society, bear the full brunt of our violent society. We are alarmed to hear that as many as 96 children have been arrested for illegal mining at Stillfontein with the youngest being 14 years old. According to news reports the children were trafficked and forced to work underground against their will. They come from Mozambique, Zimbabwe, Namibia and Lesotho. This is deeply concerning because these children are being violently exploited and this abuse seems to be happening, and it is as if there are no safeguards to prevent child labour which is illegal in South Africa.

At the same time, we have extremely high levels of teen pregnancy. Nearly 365 teenage girls give birth every single day, and at least 10 of those daily births are to Moms who are younger than 15 years of age. This is according to Bhekisisa, the Centre for Health Journalism. That means young girls are being raped and are forced to become mothers long before they are ready. We are a society which is failing to protect its own children from sexual predators.

Teenagers who fall pregnant experience intense hardship because it forces many girls to drop out of school. They end up struggling to find a job and this deepens and prolongs the cycle of poverty.

This is unsustainable and it shows that we have very serious societal problems. We cannot divorce these statistics from the failure of liberalism and capitalism to transform the lives of the majority of people. Whilst it is important for us as a society to be aware of this campaign, we cannot simply pay lip service to it. The NUMSA 2nd Deputy President Puleng Phaka expanded on this and said,

“This campaign must not exist only in the calendar, but it has to reflect in our daily lives through our values. The statistics paint a horrible picture about how violent South African society is. But this is not surprising because we are the most unequal society in the world, and there is a

lot of research connecting inequality to violence. Until a genuine effort is made to eradicate inequality, we will unfortunately be forced to live with the scourge.”

We urge the government to address the following:

1. The inadequate support services for survivors, of gender based violence. There are few shelters and counselling centres for survivors especially in rural areas. Survivors often have nowhere to go for long term recovery assistance.
2. Police stations lack trained staff and adequate resources to handle GBV cases. There is still a problem in addressing sexual violence in a manner which respects the dignity of the victim, and these cases must be treated with a level of sensitivity. Unfortunately, victims of GBV have reported that they are re-victimized by dismissive or hostile members of the police services.
3. The state must act with speed to eradicate child trafficking and punish those responsible for violating child labour laws.

Furthermore we need to teach young people about consent and respecting boundaries and ensure that they have a deeper understanding of sexual responsibility. Whilst we note that some of this is taught in Life Orientation in schools, much more needs to be done. During this time we must also challenge harmful attitudes such as victim blaming.

ENDS.

This statement was issued on behalf of NUMSA.

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