

KEYNOTE ADDRESS BY THE EXECUTIVE MAYOR OF MATJHABENG LOCAL MUNICIPALITY, ME MATHABO MOKAPO ON THE OCCASION OF THE LAUNCH OF THE 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILD ABUSE CAMPAIGN IN MATJHABENG, 25 NOVEMBER 2006, WELKOM

**Programme Director
Honourable Councillors
Honourable Pastors
Management of Harmony Gold Mining Company
Management and members of the Department of Justice
Management and members of the Department of Correctional Services
Management and members of the Department of Home Affairs
Management and members of the SAPS
Distinguished Guests
Ladies and Gentlemen**

I am overwhelmed to address you on this mammoth occasion of the launch of the 16 Days of Activism against Women and Child Abuse within Matjhabeng Local Municipality. I am certain that all of us gathered here today, can give testimony to the fact that what brought us together is a matter that cuts across the hearts and minds of all the inhabitants of our country, and the world at large.

The launch of this important campaign today, marks the 16th Anniversary of the 16 days of activism against gender violence campaign worldwide. It is important for us to note that this international campaign originated from the first Women's Global leadership Institute sponsored by the Center for Women's Global Leadership in 1991. The participants chose the dates extending from November 25, which is International Day Against Women violence and December 10, which is International Human Rights Day. The objective was to symbolically link violence against women and human rights to emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights. The 16 Day period also highlights other significant dates including November 29 (i.e. International Women Rights Defenders Day), December 1 (i.e. World Aids Day), December 6 which marks the Anniversary of the Montreal Massacre.

Also, we should note that the campaign started as an international campaign of violence against women only, and we in South Africa adapted the campaign to include violence against children due to the high prevalence of child abuse in our country.

Since the campaign started in our country 9 years ago, some of its objectives have been:

- To increase the level of awareness amongst the people on the high incidence of violence committed against women and children. Also how it manifests itself within South African society and its negative impact on the vulnerable groups.
- Challenge perpetrators to change their behavior.
- Encourage sectoral participation and support for the campaign by working with organized labor, networks which focus on women and children's issues, faith based organizations, traditional leaders and others in outreach programmes.

- Create support services for survivors
- Enhance prevention efforts
- Press for legal and judicial reform

For us to be able to make the necessary strategic interventions we need a thorough understanding of what violence/abuse against women and children is, effects of this scourge and its causes.

In all societies, to a greater or lesser degree, women and children are subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse that cuts across all lines of income, class and culture. Some women experience domestic violence in the family at the hands of an abusive partner or relative. Others face sexual harassment in the workplace. Women may also be forced into prostitution by traffickers, and in times of conflict it is women who are most likely to be the target of sexual violence.

Aside from the physical, emotional and mental toll on women and children, violence prevents them from participating fully in society. Violence limits access to resources, such as land, water and food. It also limits the ability to participate in activities such as work, education, travel and community meetings.

Violence/ abuse against women and children also carries economic costs for both the individual and society. While the cost implications are difficult to assess, some of the costs include missed work, health care for survivors, emergency shelters and legal procedures to bring perpetrators to justice. For these reasons violence against women and children constitutes a major obstacle to development, peace and security.

It is a commonly held belief that discrimination and unequal power relations lie at the heart of women's/children's greater vulnerability to violence, and that addressing the inequality that is deeply entrenched in all societies must be central to our responses to the issue.

Throughout history, violence has been used as a way of controlling women, both within the family and the wider society. There are a number of cultural, social and political factors which perpetuate and exacerbate the problem. Equally, the issue of violence against women must not be separated from other important issues affecting women, such as HIV/AIDS.

In our own scenario, as South Africa we inherited a political and socio economic system that was characterized by gross inequalities in terms of income, education, unemployment, poverty and all other social ills; due to the legacy of colonialism and apartheid. This situation contributes immensely to the high levels of child and women abuse prevalent in our society. The challenge therefore now, as we enter the second decade of freedom, is to build our economy towards a trajectory of higher growth, reducing unemployment, curbing illiteracy and fighting gender inequality in all its forms.

We also need to ensure that our women are equipped with the necessary skills to be able to participate in the mainstream economy and occupy various fields and roles that were previously the domain of men. Empowering our women with skills will also enable them to lead independent and sustainable livelihoods, so that they cannot forcefully remain in abusive marriages because they cannot sustain themselves economically.

In the same vein, within our country, children have not been treated with respect and dignity, but as a direct result of oppression they have been subjected to discrimination and violence that has destroyed families and social relationships.

On account of the above, a need therefore arises for us to give attention to improving the life of children and protecting their rights. As leaders of tomorrow children must be protected and given the right to participate in consultations about their future. They must be allowed to express their opinions and be given a right to be heard on all matters that affect them, including abuse.

As a society we must ensure that children are protected from all types of violence including physical, emotional, verbal, psychological, sexual and domestic. We must educate our children about abuse and encourage them to form youth groups to protect them from abuse.

Our country has made impressive strides in recognizing the roles and rights of women and children. The Constitution recognizes gender equality as the cornerstone of our democracy, and legislation such as the Domestic Violence Act has been lauded for enforcing the rights of women. But more needs to be done because changing laws can be swift, though giving them effect and changing the mindsets that often render them ineffective is a much more demanding task.

The changing of mindsets is a crucial aspect for the eradication of women and child abuse. We need to engage in a process of socializing our people differently, and move away from oppressive ways that reduce the rights of other groups in society. To be successful in this mission, efforts and energies of all sectors of society must be pulled together to ensure that mindsets do change.

In this light therefore, through partnerships we must support the development of local strategies and responses to abuse that include counseling and support services for survivors. We must engage in consistent education and awareness-raising to reduce intolerance and increase knowledge of the causes and consequences of abuse. Men and women must be encouraged to work together and involve the wider community in order to bring about lasting change in attitudes and behavior.

The 16 Days of Activism challenges us, as the Matjhabeng community to declare a truce on violence/abuse against women and children-and ultimately to make it a permanent one.

As this campaign unfolds within Matjhabeng and in line with this year's Theme "**Act against Abuse**" let us ensure that:

- We generate greater awareness on the negative impact of abuse on the development of women and children.
- Stress the importance of partnerships between government and civil society in eradicating women and child abuse.
- Let us involve men and boys as crucial role players in the eradication of violence against women and children.
- We must continue to provide victims and survivors of violence with information about legislative services and other mechanisms put in place by the government to ameliorate the impact of abuse on their lives.

I wish to take this opportunity to convey a message of support and sympathy to those who were victims of abuse within our community. I am appealing to them to understand that they are not alone in their miseries. Government, civil society, business and labor are willing to lend a hand and will always stand by your side. At the same breath, please ensure that you take advantage of legislative and institutional frameworks that have been created to resolve your problems.

On this note, I wish to appeal to the perpetrators, particularly those who have been rehabilitated to spread the gospel to others, that abuse is immoral and unjust and further than that it is a gross violation of human rights which must be stopped forthwith. In our families and communities let men be seen to be at the forefront in the fight against abuse, for without their active involvement this scourge will not be eradicated from our midst.

Today, we were fortunate to witness presentations made by both a victim and a perpetrator of abuse. The episodes they presented should serve as an eye-opener about the dangers that go with abuse. And I wish to encourage everyone to emulate them by speaking openly at all times about their ordeals that relate to abuse, so that in the process the community gets educated and conscious about abuse and its ramifications.

Lastly, as a country we need to close the gap between the rhetoric of gender equality and the reality on the ground.

Thank you

**COUNCILLOR MATHABO MOKAPO
EXECUTIVE MAYOR**