



16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM FOR NO VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND CHILDREN

“Accelerating actions to end gender-based violence & femicide: leaving no one behind”



About the Campaign

South Africa participates in the United Nations 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign, held annually from 25 November (International Day of no Violence against Women) to 10 December (International Human Rights Day). The aim of this period is to focus on and create awareness about the consequences of gender-based violence and femicide and its impact on the lives on women and children. The period also coincides with World AIDS Day on 1 December and the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, commemorated on 3 December. The period was designated by the UN General Assembly to raise public awareness on gender-based violence. While the primary focus is therefore on advocating for no violence, it is clear that it is also a time to shed light on issues that affect other marginalised and vulnerable groups in society.

Since 1998, South Africa has run a parallel campaign, making 2023 the 25th anniversary of the campaign in South Africa. The 16 Days Campaign forms the centre point of government’s comprehensive 365 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children.

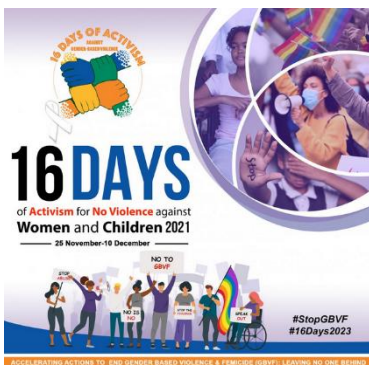
The South African focus of this year’s campaign is “Accelerating actions to end gender-based violence & femicide: leaving no one behind.”

Globally, the theme is “Unite! Invest to Prevent Violence against Women & Girls” and calls on citizens to show how much they care about ending violence against women and girls and on governments worldwide to share how they are investing in gender-based violence prevention.

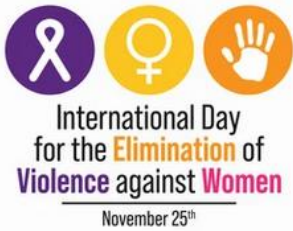
Women, persons with disabilities, those living with HIV/AIDS, persons from the LGBTQIA+ community and all other marginalised and vulnerable groups have a right to human dignity, equality, justice, freedom, safety and security.

Concerted efforts must be made to ensure that all rights as enshrined in the Constitution are afforded and that all legislative measures, policies and programmes affecting the lives of the most vulnerable are adequately resourced and funded to ensure that no one is left behind.

Globally, an estimated 736 million women - almost 1 in 3 - have been subjected to physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence, non-partner sexual violence, or both, at least once in their life



International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women



International day for the Elimination of Violence against Women has its roots in the honouring of the Mirabal sisters,

three political activists from the Dominican Republic, who were murdered on 26 November 1960 after opposing the country's then dictatorship rule.

While many international, regional and domestic mechanisms and laws for the prevention and elimination of violence against women exists, gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) remains pervasive throughout the world. Violence against women also transcends physical and domestic settings – women also experience violence in workspaces and online.

The United Nations highlights that there is a long way to go on a global scale:

To date, only two out of three countries have outlawed domestic violence, while 37 countries worldwide still exempt rape perpetrators from prosecution if they are married to or eventually marry the victim and 49 countries currently have no laws protecting women from domestic violence.¹

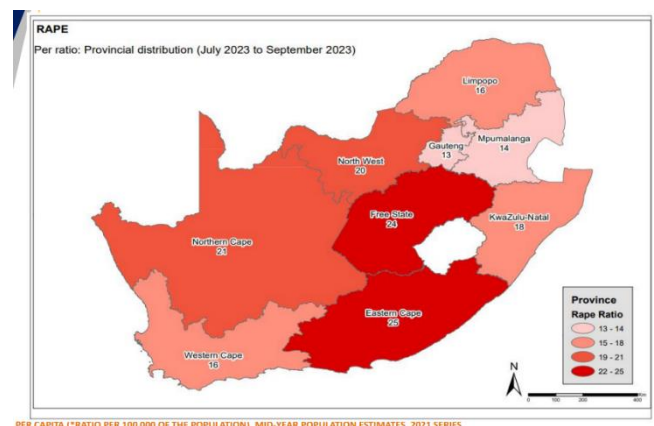
South Africa has extensive legislation dealing with violence against women, however the scourge of GBVF continues unabated.

¹<https://www.un.org/en/observances/ending-violence-against-women-day/background>

The Minister of Police recently stated that “It is clear, attacks and violence meted on women, children, the elderly and the most vulnerable in this country, remains shameful. The scourge of violence against women and children in South Africa, must be confronted equally by law enforcement, the whole of government and the whole of society, head on... the crime figures show that far too many women and children in this country are NOT safe around people that they know and trust and at times those that they love and in the places where they are supposed to be safe.”²

Between April and September 2023 the following statistics were recorded³:

- Over 27 000 women were victims of assault with intent to cause grievous bodily harm (GBH).
- 1 776 women were murdered and 2 931 were victims of attempted murder.
- Over 19 700 rape cases were opened with the SAPS.
- More than 24 000 cases of domestic violence were reported including 476 murders, 587 cases attempted murder, 1 789 reported



PER CAPITA (*RATIO PER 100 000 OF THE POPULATION). MID-YEAR POPULATION ESTIMATES, 2021 SERIES

²<https://www.gov.za/speeches/minister-bheki-cele-second-quarter-crime-statistics-20232024-17-nov-2023-0000>

³ SAPS 2023 quarter 1 and 2 crime stats as released

rapes, 14 175 cases of assault GBH and 31 266 cases of common assault.

- The Eastern Cape and Free State have the highest ratios of rape in the country, at 25 and 24 per 100 000 of the population in the province.

In many instances women were victims of crime in their own homes, with the perpetrators being known to the victims. More than 8 600 women were raped in private residences, i.e. their own homes, the home of the perpetrator, or homes of family, friends or neighbours – this is an indication that women are not safe in private or public spaces.

These figures are cause for concern, however, more concerning is that this may not be a true reflection of the actual number of crimes against women. The UN indicates that less than 40 percent of the women who experience violence seek help of any sort. Among women who do seek help, most look to family and friends and very few look to formal institutions, such as police and health services. Fewer than 10 percent of those seeking help reported to the police.⁴

To ensure a coordinated national response to the pandemic of Gender Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF), the South African government approved the National Strategic Plan on Gender Based Violence and Femicide (NSP-GBVF). The Plan sets out to provide a cohesive strategic framework to guide the national response to the hyper endemic GBVF crisis in which South Africa finds itself. The

⁴<https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures#83920>

⁵ <https://gbvf.org.za/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/REFLECTIVE-REPORT-ON-THE-IMPLEMENTATION-OF-THE-SOUTH-AFRICAN-NATIONAL-STRATEGIC-PLAN-ON-GBVF-29102212noon.pdf>

plan has 6 overarching pillars for implementation focusing on:

- Accountability, Coordination and Leadership
- Prevention and Rebuilding Social Cohesion
- Justice, Safety and Protection
- Response, Care, Support and Healing
- Economic Power
- Research and Information Management

The latest reflective report on the progress of the NSP GBVF indicates that out of 203 indicators across the 6 pillars, as at September 2022, only 44 or 21.6 percent of indicators have been achieved indicating that the rate of progress has been slow.⁵

While we have extensive legislation and policy to combat gender-based violence and sexual offences, this is not translating into change in women's lived realities.

The United Nations Generation Equality Action Coalition on Gender Based Violence highlights that change for women and girls can be realised through four concrete actions:⁶

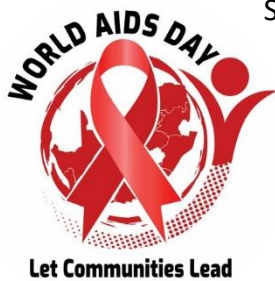


- Strengthening laws and policies and increasing resources,
- Scaling up evidence driven prevention programming,
- Scaling up comprehensive, accessible and quality services for survivors; and
- Increasing support and resources to autonomous girl-led and women's rights

⁶ https://www.unwomen.org/sites/default/files/2023-11/unite_concept_note_english.pdf

organisations to play their leadership role in ending violence against women and girls.

World AIDS Day



South Africa has one of the highest rates of gender-based violence globally. Women and girls often endure physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, perpetuated by deeply ingrained societal norms and inequalities. This violence not only inflicts immediate harm but also contributes to a heightened vulnerability to HIV/AIDS. Forced and unprotected sexual encounters are common in abusive relationships, increasing the risk of HIV transmission.

Moreover, gender-based violence impedes individuals' ability to negotiate safe sex practices. Fear of violence may prevent victims from insisting on condom use or practicing other preventive measures. Consequently, the prevalence of HIV/AIDS is disproportionately high among those who experience gender-based violence. Women who have experienced sexual violence by a partner are 1.5 times more likely to be HIV-positive.⁷

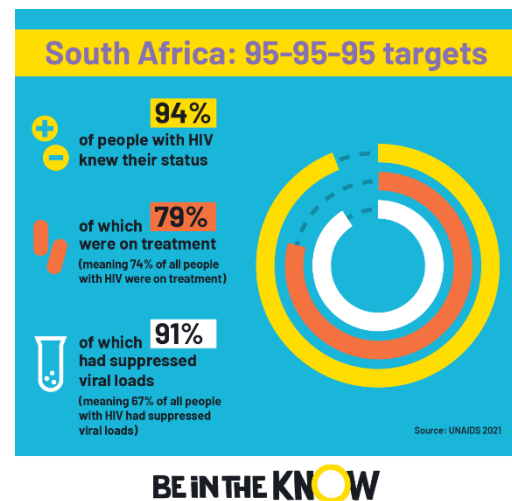
To acknowledge the impact communities have had in shaping the HIV response, as well as global health at large, the theme of World AIDS Day 2023 is **'Let communities lead'**.

⁷ Bunker, S and Kashiwase, H. (2020). Connecting the dots between HIV incidence, social norms, and gender-based violence. <https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/connecting-dots-between-hiv-incidence-social-norms-and-gender-based-violence>

⁸ Johnson, L and Dorrington, R. (2023). Thembisa version 4.6: A model for evaluating the impact of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

The World Health Organisation (2023) notes that World AIDS Day is an opportunity to reflect on the progress made to date, raise awareness about the challenges that remain to achieve the goals of ending AIDS by 2030 and mobilize all stakeholders to jointly redouble efforts to ensure the success of the HIV response.

In South Africa, this year's campaign focuses on advancing actions to ending AIDS as a public health threat by 2030, addressing issues of stigmatisation, raising awareness about the importance of screening, testing, treatment retention, prevention and also highlighting the NSP on HIV, STI and TB.



BE IN THE KNOW

This campaign is pivotal given that approximately 7.8 million people, or 13.2% of the population, were living with HIV in South Africa in 2022.⁸

According to the recently published estimates from Thembisa⁹, the leading mathematical model of HIV in South Africa, an estimated 31% of women aged 25 to 49 in South Africa were living with HIV

⁹ Thembisa is a mathematical model of the South African HIV epidemic, designed to answer policy questions relating to HIV prevention and treatment. Thembisa is also a demographic projection model and a source of demographic statistics.

in 2022. For female sex workers, the prevalence was estimated at 59%, and for men 18 or older who have sex with men it was 30%. In general, the prevalence in men was much lower than in women and children had much lower prevalence than adults.¹⁰

With 7.8 million people living with HIV in South Africa, and South African women being five times more likely to be killed by their intimate partner than women in other countries the implications of these two interconnected social problems cannot be ignored.

Challenges related to HIV/AIDS and GBV-F are not mutually exclusive. Addressing these interconnected issues requires a multifaceted approach. First and foremost, there must be comprehensive efforts to dismantle the root causes of gender-based violence, including challenging traditional gender norms and promoting gender equality. Education plays a pivotal role in changing societal attitudes and fostering respectful relationships.

Simultaneously, strategies to enhance HIV prevention and support must be implemented. This includes accessible healthcare, HIV testing, and counselling services. Specialized interventions are needed for survivors of gender-based violence to ensure they receive appropriate care and support, both physically and emotionally.

The fifth National Strategic Plan (NSP) for HIV, TB and STIs NSP 2023-2028 aims to address this by providing a strategic framework for a multi-sectoral approach that is people-and communities-centred to overcome these three

epidemics as public health threats and social challenges.

South Africa has made strides in addressing both gender-based violence and HIV/AIDS independently, but an integrated approach is imperative to tackle the intersection of these issues effectively.

International Day for Persons with Disabilities



The International Day of Persons with Disabilities, celebrated on December 3rd each year, serves as a crucial reminder of the challenges faced by individuals with disabilities worldwide. This observance aims to promote inclusivity, raise awareness about the rights of persons with disabilities, and foster a more accessible and equitable society. One of the fundamental principles underlying this day is the recognition that disability is not a hindrance to leading a fulfilling life, but rather a facet of diversity in the human experience. The United Nations initiated the observance in 1992 to emphasize the need for understanding, acceptance, and the removal of barriers that hinder the full participation of people with disabilities in all aspects of society. The theme of the 2023 International Day of Persons with Disabilities (IDPD) is: **'United in action to rescue**

¹⁰ Johnson, L and Dorrington, R. (2023). Thembisa version 4.6: A model for evaluating the impact of HIV/AIDS in South Africa.

and achieve the SDGs for, with and by persons with disabilities’.



In many parts of the world, persons with disabilities encounter numerous obstacles, ranging from physical barriers to societal prejudices. Access to education, employment, healthcare, and public spaces is often limited, perpetuating a cycle of exclusion. The International Day of Persons with Disabilities seeks to break down these barriers by fostering a sense of belonging and promoting equal opportunities for everyone, regardless of their abilities.

South Africa celebrates National Disability Rights Awareness Month (DRAM) annually between the 3rd of November and the 3rd of December- this includes the International Day of Persons with Disabilities and National Disability Rights Awareness Day. The theme for this year’s DRAM is **“Consolidate and Accelerate Rights of Persons with Disabilities into the Future”**. Spearheaded by Minister Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, the campaign focuses on consolidating and accelerating disability rights into the future and seeks to cater to diverse needs and establish an equitable society, adhering to the Bill of Rights that ensures

the right to life, equality, and human dignity for everyone.

“According to Statistics South Africa, around 7% of our population of over 60 million people has some form of disability. These are not just numbers. They represent human beings who have aspirations, dreams and purpose. They represent citizens whose rights to equal treatment and equal opportunity should be guaranteed and protected.”-President Ramaphosa, 2023.¹¹

To date, national statistics are only rarely disaggregated by disability status. Often, the little data we find on disability focuses only on disability prevalence. Lack of data and data analysis has contributed to persons with disabilities’ being often invisible in human rights and development policy debates.¹² However, the available data from the Census 2022 indicated that disability prevalence was higher for females compared to males. The results showed that both males and females recorded lower prevalence compared to Census 2011. The profile for males showed a decrease from 6.4% in 2011 to 4.9% in 2022 while females with disability decreased from 8.3% to 7.0%.¹³ While this data is useful, there is a need for in-depth data focussed on persons with disabilities in order to ensure that programmes and interventions are targeted to their specific needs.

International Day of Persons with Disabilities emphasizes the importance of changing societal attitudes. The day encourages people to challenge stereotypes, eliminate stigmas, and promote a culture that celebrates diversity. By fostering a

¹¹ President Cyril Ramaphosa (2023). Government committed to supporting people with disabilities. South African Government News Agency.

¹² Samodien, E. (2023). The Disability Data Report 2023: Data for Human Rights. South African Medical Research Council.

¹³ Statistics South Africa (2023). Census 2022. https://census.statssa.gov.za/assets/documents/2022/P03014_Census_2022_Statistical_Release.pdf

more inclusive mindset, communities can create environments that accommodate and respect the unique abilities and perspectives of all individuals.

International human rights day



10 December 2023 marks the 75th anniversary of one of the world's most ground-breaking global pledges: the [Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) (UDHR). This landmark document enshrines the inalienable rights that everyone is entitled to as a human being - regardless of race, colour, religion, sex, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status.

The primary objective of this resolution was to¹⁴:

- Celebrate human rights accomplishments.
- Raise awareness about persistent human rights challenges.
- Foster further progress in the global promotion and protection of human rights.



¹⁴Convoy of hope. 2023. International Humans Rights Day 2023. <https://convoyofhope.org/articles/international-human-rights-day/>

¹⁵ <https://www.concourt.org.za/index.php/constitution/your-rights/the-bill-of-rights>

Celebrating International Human Rights Day empowers individuals to recognize their rights, understand the rights of others, and act against discrimination, inequality, and injustice. It serves as a reminder that each person has a role to play in creating a world where human rights are universally upheld, while ensuring dignity, equality, and freedom for all. In South Africa Human Rights Day is celebrated on the 21st of March every year.

The Constitution of South Africa, adopted in 1996, following the advent of a new democratic dispensation in 1994, acknowledges the injustices suffered by many during the apartheid era and encapsulates a set of principles to improve the quality of life of all citizens. In the words of the Constitutional Court of South Africa: “The Bill of Rights is arguably the part of the Constitution that has had the greatest impact on life in this country. As the first words of this chapter say: this Bill of Rights is a cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all people in our country and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality, and freedom.”¹⁵

Furthermore, Parliament established the South African Human Rights Commission (SAHRC) in terms of Section 184 of the Constitution. The mandate of the Commission is to promote, protect and monitor the development and observance of human rights in our country¹⁶. South Africa is a signatory to several conventions which seek to protect the human rights of everyone globally and locally especially those who are most vulnerable including women and children¹⁷.

¹⁶ Parliament of the Republic of South Africa. https://www.parliament.gov.za/storage/app/media/EducationPubs/human_rights_email_eng.pdf

¹⁷ Ibid

Firstly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is a predecessor to our Bill of Rights. Secondly, South Africa signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination (ICERD)¹⁸.



2023 Theme: Freedom, Equality and Justice for All

This year’s theme, “Equality, Freedom, and Justice for All,” carries profound significance, as it encapsulates the core principles that the United Nations upholds in its mission to promote and protect human rights worldwide¹⁹.

EQUALITY serves as a powerful reminder that every individual, irrespective of their background or circumstances, deserves equal opportunities and treatment. It champions the idea that no one should face discrimination or prejudice based on factors beyond their control.

FREEDOM underscores the importance of individual liberties, such as freedom of speech, religion, and assembly. It emphasizes that people should have the autonomy to express themselves, follow their beliefs, and assemble peacefully.

JUSTICE speaks to the need for a fair and impartial legal system that ensures the rights of all are upheld. It demands accountability and fairness in legal proceedings and promotes the idea that justice should be accessible to everyone, regardless of their status or resources.

¹⁸ Ibid

Concluding comments

South Africa has introduced progressive and extensive legislation, policies and programmes to advance human and women’s rights, however, the lived realities of vulnerable groups, and women in particular does not bear testament to this.

Women in South Africa have repeatedly shown their resilience in facing socio-economic challenges – despite being disproportionately affected by poverty, unpaid care work, the gender pay gap, insecure employment and gender-based violence, among others. Women continue to advocate and call for change in all spheres of their lives. Efforts to support women in these endeavours and eliminate gender-based violence and femicide must be promoted and sustained to ensure that change is seen in this lifetime. In addition, legislation and policies for persons with disabilities must be fast-tracked.

The commitments made during this year’s 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign must be upheld and realised to guarantee 365 days of no violence against women and children and ensure that no one is left behind.



¹⁹ <https://niraaleeshah.medium.com/united-nations-day-2023-celebrating-75-years-of-human-rights-and-global-equality-2667f129aac5>

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