



KWAZULU-NATAL CHRISTIAN COUNCIL

“Structures of Violence: Defining the Intersections of Militarism and Violence Against Women”

A Pastoral Letter of the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council

Dear friends, colleagues, member organisations and churches of the KwaZulu-Natal Christian Council (KZNCC), the entire Ecumenical Movement in KwaZulu-Natal (KZN) and the people of the province of KZN, greetings.

The time and days dedicated for the campaign on ‘No Violence Against Women and Children’ has come – 25 November to 10 December 2015. The campaign now calls us to take the struggle and conscientising of people on ‘No Violence Against Women and Children’ to the structures and corridors which sustain the abuse of women and children - physically by rape, battering and murder; emotionally through verbal abuse, debasement, hauling, yelling and harrowing.

As our new song *Awuyeke* says ‘Stop it’. We must stop sexual harassment and psychological repression of women and children. We need to bring to an end, child exploitation and human trafficking. We need to continue to unite and form partnerships to respond actively throughout the whole year against abuse of women and children in structures and institutions such as the home, schools, the justice system, hospitals and places of entertainment where women and children are exposed to possibilities of violence and abuse. It is indeed very stressful, upsetting, vexing and distressing for women and children to suffer such ordeals everyday of their lives. All members of society, women and men, children, people with disabilities, the elderly and marginalised minorities must break the silence of this trauma and distress. This pain, sorrow, misery and unhappiness must be purged from our homes, communities and institutions as a matter of urgency.

Notwithstanding that certain forms of culture, religion and sexism have been vehicles of unpleasant ideas which over the years have perpetuated the sufferings, exclusion, oppression, and dishonour of women and children. Culture as a construct of historically repressive patriarchal societies in relation to its degradation of women and children must be held critically when it continues to imbibe ideas such as the notion of the inferiority of women against men based on gender or sexual differences. Some form of religion as one cultural expression which promotes the defilement, shame and humiliation of women in particular like this following prayer according to rabbinical custom: “... to thank God daily, as a man, that you had not been born a woman, slave or foreigner ...”

which is disgustingly, sexist, oppressive, xenophobic and racist must be opposed. Such religious practices must have no haven in modern society and the democracies which seek the rights of women and children.

The emancipation of women and children is a 'Human Right' and a Constitutional obligation which all people must uphold, protect and defend. All people, women and children included have a right to peace, love, security and wellbeing. In order for humanity including women and children to progress further than where we are now in terms of world progress the following findings of the Unicef report (2007) must be made known and followed through:

“Gender equality and the well-being of children go hand in hand. Gender equality furthers the cause of child survival and development. Gender equality produces a double dividend: It benefits both women and children. Healthy, educated and empowered women have healthy, educated and confident daughters and sons. Gender equality will not only empower women to overcome poverty and live full and productive lives, but will better the lives of children, families and countries as well. Women’s equal rights and influence in the key decisions that shape their lives and those of children must be enhanced in three distinct arenas: the household, the workplace and the political sphere”.

“A change for the better in any one of these realms influences women’s equality in the others, and has a profound and positive impact on child’s well-being and development. Gender equality is not only morally right, it is pivotal to human progress and sustainable development. Achieving Millennium Development Goal Number 3—promoting gender equality and empowering women—will also contribute to achieving all the other goals, from reducing poverty and hunger to saving children’s lives, improving maternal health, ensuring universal education, combating HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases, and ensuring environmental sustainability”.

Humanity must realise now that the oppression and violence against women and children holds back advancement and progress. It has already been articulated elsewhere that poverty and inequality go hand-in-hand. Poverty and inequality are inseparable. The political, economic, cultural, religious and social exclusion of women and children stifles human attempts to fight poverty and inequality. The marginalisation and violence against women and children suffocates the civil liberties we so much desire. Humanity must now wake up to the fact that the incarceration of women is no emancipation of humanity – that the freedom of all people cannot be realised fully until women and children enjoy the same rights, freedoms and responsibilities, in a world where all humanity holds with dignity all peoples despite of gender and age.

Also remember that: “Children's rights are the human rights of children with particular attention to the rights of special protection and care afforded to the young,¹¹ including their right to association with both biological parents, human identity as well as the basic needs for food,

universal state-paid education, health care and criminal laws appropriate for the age and development of the child.^[2] Interpretations of children's rights range from allowing children the capacity for autonomous action to the enforcement of children being physically, mentally and emotionally free from abuse, []. Other definitions include the rights to care and nurturing” (Wikipedia).^[3]

In closer, beloved, let us go out there and support the ‘16 Days of Activism on No Violence Against Women and Children’. It is a noble thing to do during these 16 Days as mentioned earlier and beyond – meaning, every day of our lives.

Chief Executive Officer

Chairperson