



Response

December 4th 2020

16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children

"Give justice to the weak ... maintain the right of the afflicted and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy; deliver them from the hand of the wicked." Psalm 82:3-4

The 16 Days of Activism for No Violence against Women and Children Campaign (16 Days Campaign) is a global United Nations campaign which takes place annually from 25th November (International Day of No Violence against Women) to 10th December (International Human Rights Day). Other key commemorative days during this period include World Aids Day on the 1st December and the International Day for Persons with Disabilities, on 3rd December.

It was started by activists at the inaugural Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991 and continues to be coordinated each year by the Centre for Women's Global Leadership. It is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls. In South Africa this includes all children as well.¹ Liturgically, this period takes place during the beginning of Advent and preparation for Christmas.

Many are understandably cynical about the impact of the annual focus on the issue of violence toward women and children, which they regard as playing mere lip-service to the problem with no perceivable outcome. It is useful to explore what the '16 Days of Activism and Campaigning' means so as to understand its importance and why it cannot be packed away with the Christmas decorations until next year. **Activism** is action on behalf of a cause that goes beyond what is conventional or routine.² **Activism** consists of efforts to promote, impede, direct, or intervene in social, political, economic, or environmental reform with the desire to make changes in society toward a perceived greater good.³ A **campaign** involves work in an organized and active way towards a particular goal, typically a political or social one.⁴ A **campaign** is a planned set of activities that people carry out over a period of time in order to achieve something such as social or political change.⁵ This shapes a socio-economic and psycho-social **legacy** that will endure. It should be about establishing and passing on institutions and forms of conduct that are of lasting value for the well-being of those who will live on after us.⁶ This involves sustained commitment.

The explosion of gender-based violence (GBV) and violence against children during the lockdown has made it abundantly clear the measures taken thus far have not been working. While children are not always the target of GBV, they are often 'collateral damage'. Children learn how to be in the world by watching how the adults in their world relate to each other and to children; this is particularly the case within the home. Children brought up in an environment where any form of abuse is common (this

includes ridicule and other forms of verbal abuse), may grow up to regard this as 'normal', as they do not have the maturity or experience to interpret this experience differently. Older children might attempt to intervene to protect their mothers.

Robyn Farrell, CEO of 1st for Women Insurance Company, says the company's re-evaluation of their programmes addressing GBV started with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and our own National Development Plan to end poverty, fight inequality and injustice. "Through our research we found that male superiority and a culture of violence, which manifests itself in the form of patriarchy, control, sexual entitlement and unhealthy conflict resolution skills are determining factors towards women abuse."⁷ Our social discourse is the product of a violent past and an uncertain future. The complexity of the issue requires "a multifaceted approach to address the underlying attitudes, beliefs, practices and systems that condone, justify or excuse gender inequality."⁸

The Cape Chamber of Commerce recently issued a strongly worded statement saying that "the South African workplace is where 11 million people meet every day. It's a solid section of society and a good place to spread the word that real men don't prey on the weak and that those who do deserve nothing but contempt. We must all do our bit to change public perceptions of gender-based violence. It is not a domestic issue best kept in the family. Its scope and pernicious influence on society make it a national disgrace."⁹ The delivery of social services and family support services that aid in the development of social competence and behaviours that contribute to the health and welfare of families, is critical. These services should be included in childcare centres, early childhood development centres, clinics, churches and community centres.

We need **advocacy** and **campaigning** that interrupts this destructive dynamic and which leaves a very different legacy to future generations. Be mindful of St Paul's letter to the Ephesians: "Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."¹⁰

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¹ The government is in the process of implementing the Emergency Response Action Plan on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide, which was announced by President Cyril Ramaphosa in **September 2019**.

² <https://www.bmartin.cc/pubs/07Anderson.html>

³ <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Activism>

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<https://www.google.com/search?q=campaign+meaning&oq=campaig&aqs=chrome.2.0i433j69i57j0i433j0l4j69i61.19559j0j7&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-8>

⁵ <https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/campaign>

⁶ <https://billhigh.com/legacy/10-verses-on-biblical-legacy/>

⁷ The Big Issue, July –August 2020 pp 16-17

⁸ The Big Issue, July- August 2020 pp 16-17

⁹ https://www.politicsweb.co.za/politics/gbv-is-not-unfortunate-its-a-national-disgrace--ja?utm_source=Politicsweb

¹⁰ Ephesians 5: 11