

**Speech by KwaZulu-Natal MEC Belinda Scott during
uMgungundlovu District Launch of 16 Days of Activism for No
Violence Against Women and Children at Edendale Lay Ecumenical
Centre in Pietermaritzburg on 25 November 2014**

Programme Director;

Mayor of uMgungundlovu District Municipality, Councillor Bhamjee,

Mayor of Msunduzi, Councillor Ndlela,

Mayor of Mkhambathini, Councillor Maphumulo,

Mayor of Richmond, Councillor Ragavaloo,

Mayor of uMshwathi, Councillor Gwala,

Mayor of Impendle, Councillor Ndlela,

All Councillors,

Government Officials,

Amakhosi,

Leaders of Faith-Based organisations,

Leaders from all sectors,

Human Rights Activists,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Fellow South Africans,

Sanibonani!

Today, we officially launch the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children in uMgungundlovu District. This campaign is an annual event endorsed by the United Nations to raise awareness against abuse directed on women and children. It will run until the 10th December 2014.

Gender based violence has become an intractable social problem in South Africa and particularly, in KwaZulu-Natal. The recent police statistics indicates that uMgungundlovu District is the second highest district with the total number of reported sexual crimes in KZN after eThekweni.

The conscious setting aside of 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children, is a small but highly significant effort to jolt the collective conscience of the South African society to the pervasive but often ignored scourge that lies just below the surface in our daily lives.

Sixteen days are a very short period, considering the enormity of the abuse that women, children, people living with disabilities, and other vulnerable people who suffer on a daily basis.

Programme Director, the campaign we are launching today runs under different themes each year. The theme this year is: "**Count Me In, Moving A Non-Violent South Africa Forward!**"

For the duration of the campaign, it should therefore be a period when all freedom loving South Africans - those who cherish the ideal of a country free from all forms of exploitation, abuse and humiliation; where champions of human rights and dignity stand up and galvanise support for all efforts to ensure that the most vulnerable people who are denied their basic humanity are finally free from the yoke of oppression - which is the supreme founding principle of our democracy. For if the most vulnerable of our society are not truly free, then all of us are not truly free.

It gives me hope when I see so many of you present here as we launch the campaign. The presence of youth, middle aged adults and grandparents gives me hope that we are able to speak to all sections of our population. The message we want to share with you is that abuse in general is wrong and cannot be tolerated. Let alone when it is inflicted against women, children, people living with disabilities and vulnerable people in society.

We are particularly happy that we also partnering with The Provincial Men's Forum in the province who have taken a position against any form of abuse against women and children. We appreciate your unequivocal resolve and it shows that our youth, particularly males, already have a good example to learn from.

As we celebrate 20 Years of Democracy, we - as a country - have a lot to be proud of. Not only do we have what is universally regarded as the most progressive constitution in the world and the Bill of Rights, but we also have a fully functional and independent judiciary. Our whole legal system is in place and our people have become highly aware of the rights of the individual. And, even though there are some detractors, we have a whole social system that is centred on the improvement of the living conditions of all members of communities that were previously systematically deprived of their basic human rights and dignity.

Indeed, as a new democracy, we have done exceptionally well. The democratic government has taken tremendous strides in the improvement of the living conditions of its citizens in the provision of basic needs such as water, electric and sanitation. Education today is a basic right for every child, and corporal punishment has been banished

from our school. The right of chastisement today explicitly prohibits the beating of children.

Strides have been successfully taken in the provision of adult education and many adults, especially women, have grasped this opportunity to improve their reading skills. Today we boast that we have women occupying influential positions in our society both in government and business fraternity. Their contribution is phenomenal. While all these measures have been put in place and successfully implemented, the sad truth remains that as families, communities and a country we still have a long way to go in terms of the upholding of the rights and dignity of the weakest of our citizens: our children, women and the disabled.

For a country with our proud history and record of struggle against oppression, tyranny and exploitation, it remains a great source of shame that our record on the abuse of our most vulnerable remains one of the highest in the civilised world. This one aspect, of our otherwise highly esteemed democracy, remains a blight that stains all the strides that we have taken in terms of human rights.

That as a society built on the constitutional respect of the right of the individual - with guaranteed freedom of speech and expression - yet we still have high rates of spousal abuse and murder; child abuse, neglect and molestation; human trafficking, where the most exploited are women and children; including prostitution and other exploitation, is a massive indictment on our hard earned democracy. It is indeed a huge betrayal of the sacrifices made over several decades by a dedicated and disciplined cadre of freedom fighters, who often made the supreme sacrifice for the freedom that we enjoy today.

It is important for us as government to form partnerships with community members, business sector, non-governmental institutions, non-profit organisations, traditional leadership structures, faith-based organisations and all other stakeholders to find ways to combat abuse on our people.

We must know that if abuse continues to exist in our society, it is a cancer that will reverse the gains that our government has achieved over the past 20 years. Our women will lose their respect and dignity; they will be sidelined in society; they will not be able to hold positions of influence in society; their role in economic sphere of our country will be taken away; and they will lose many other democratic dispensation values that the administration of the ANC government has achieved.

Allow me, Programme Director, to say that this government has made significant strides to strike a balance in our society and uplift and protect our women and children. These include:

- o Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act which ensures that women have equal enjoyment of rights and freedoms, in addressing the wrongs of the past;
- o The Employment Equity Act which ensures that discrimination in employment, occupation and income within the labour market that resulted from apartheid laws are curtailed;
- o The Maintenance Act which guarantees the rights of a child to a living standard which is adequate for physical, mental, spiritual and social development;
- o The Domestic Violence Act which affords survivors of violence maximum protection from domestic abuse; and

o The Children's Act was enacted to amongst others, protect a child from maltreatment, neglect, abuse or degradation.

This is not the end. Government will continue to devise and implement interventions that protect the human dignity of women and children when a need arises. After all, this is was elected into office by the majority of our people, including women.

There is a simple expression that says "charity begins at home". It simply means that we must start doing good things at home. That is why I started my work today by addressing the Provincial Treasury staff to ensure that they are not left outside as we launch this important campaign.

Addressing the staff, I emphasised that they need to work hard, be honest and reliable to their families as much as they need to be at their work. If they uphold to the values in line with the principle of putting people first, their families will shine and be exemplary to society. I have no doubt that the department will achieve goals and set new standards if they follow these values.

I want all of us here to do the same. We must:

- Work hard to cleanse our families and communities of abuse directed to women and children;
- Be honest to ourselves that we uphold the rights of women and children - don't turn a blind eye to abuse, even if it occurs in our households;
- Be reliable to women and children - they must feel safe and protected around us.

We must fight abuse - no matter what form it comes in. It can be physical, emotional, financial, or any other form. Government alone cannot stop it. We must work together and make SA a better place to live in.

Siyabonga!

Thank you!