

**Speech by KwaZulu-Natal MEC Belinda Scott addressing the  
Provincial Treasury staff during the Launch of 16 Days of Activism  
for No Violence Against Women and Children at Trizon Towers in  
Pietermaritzburg on 25 November 2014**

Programme Director;

HoD, Mr Magagula;

Acting Accounting Officer; Mr Conradie

General Managers;

Senior Managers

All Staff

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today, uMgungundlovu District joins the provincial and national spheres of government to launch the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children.

I am encouraged to speak to such a mixed-age audience as amongst you is youth, middle aged adults and grandparents. We all need to be involved in the fight against abuse so that we can win this scourge. Our country needs you to raise hands and help to build a progressive society.

The theme for this year is: **Count me in, Moving a Non-Violent South Africa Forward!** Let us be counted today and say enough is enough. We must protect our women, children and vulnerable people. We must report any form of abuse to the police.

As you may know, the 16 Days of Activism for No Violence Against Women and Children campaign is an annual event endorsed by the United Nations to raise awareness against abuse directed on women and children. The campaign officially begins on the 25<sup>th</sup> of November and runs through until the 10<sup>th</sup> of December.

South Africa adopted the Campaign in 1998 as one of the intervention strategies towards creating a society free of violence. Recognising that violence against women and children persisted, the Campaign was broadened to encompass a year-long integrated national plan of action to eliminate violence against women and children.

Today, I want to share with you a sad story of few women who were abused in uMgungundlovu District.

At the age of 64, she woke up in the crack of dawn and left her house early in the morning to get to the clinic for her medical appointment. She left behind her partner, children and grand children hoping to return better from the clinic and meet her loved ones at home later in the day. This was not to be.

While walking to the clinic, she came across criminals lurking in the street. She was dragged into the bush, raped and killed. This is the sad story that occurred two years ago in Dambuza.

This happened a few weeks after two elderly women (94 years and 82 years) were attacked and raped in separate incidents in Swayimane. Unlike in the Dambuza incident , both Swayimane women were attacked in their houses by criminals. The Swayimane incidents were preceded

by the death of a 16-year old woman whose beheaded body was found lying behind a house in the same area hardly a year earlier.

Just a few months ago this year, an Ashdown woman was found dead a few kilometres away from her home after she was reportedly attacked by her partner. The partner was subsequently arrested in connection with her murder. More similar incidents have been reported in uMgungundlovu sending the shock waves throughout the district, leaving everyone angry that our women, elderly and vulnerable people, and children were attacked by criminals.

These gender-based violence incidents tell us that as much as it is not safe for our women to walk in the street and it may also be not safe for them to be in their households. The incidents, however, may not reflect the general picture of our society but they are a reality that in our midst we have people who do not have respect for the human lives.

Gender 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.

This tells us that we are not on the right track. We must not tolerate any untoward behaviour that infringe on other people. I want to be straight forward with you. This government cannot tolerate abuse - whether out there in the community or here in the department. Government has gone into great length to implement policies that entrench rights for women, children, people with disabilities and vulnerable people. We cannot allow anyone who would try to infringe these rights.

This year, we celebrate 20 Years of Democracy. In doing so we take stock of what we have achieved and acknowledge the challenges before us. I want to tell you that, we 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.

We urge all stakeholders to raise their hands and be counted in our fight against drug and substance abuse. We must tighten the noose on criminal elements plaguing our society. Government is committed to deliver quality services to our people.

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 government was elected into office by the majority of our people, including women.

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!