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## **Address by President Jacob Zuma during the launch of the 2015 Campaign of 16 Days for No Violence Against Women and Children...**

**Date:** Wednesday, November 25, 2014

The Premier of Bokone Bophirima province, Mr Supra Mahumapelo,  
The Minister in the Presidency for Women, Madame Susan Shabangu,  
Ministers and Deputy Ministers present,  
MECs, Executive Mayors,  
Traditional leaders,  
Religious leaders,  
The community at large,

I greet you all on this important day in the calendar of our country.

We are gathered to officially launch the campaign of 16 days of activism for no violence against women and children. The 2015 theme is Count Me In: Together Moving a Non-Violent South Africa Forward.

South Africa adopted the 16 Days Campaign for No Violence Against Women and Children in 1998 as part of building a society that is free of violence.

The unity in the execution of this campaign has been remarkable over the years.

Every year since 1998, government, non-governmental organisations, faith based organisations, labour, business, media and other sectors work together to broaden the impact of the campaign.

The success has arisen because of the decision that we took as democratic South Africa not to cover up, deny or condone violence against women and children.

Violence and the abuse of women and children exist and must be fought by all of us.

The scourge of abuse and violence occurs in both the home and in the public sphere.

Women are hurt by people they know and love and also by total strangers who want to exercise power over them.

Domestic violence in particular must not be taken lightly. It is not a private matter when a man beats up a woman who happens to be his wife or girlfriend. It is a serious crime. Our country takes this crime very seriously. We have declared it a priority crime. All community members must treat it equally seriously. It should also be understood that the attacks on women and children are a gross violation of their rights. It is a moral and ethical degeneration and a stain on our collective conscience. The sexual abuse of children in particular, can lead to lost childhoods, abandoned education, physical and emotional problems, the spread of HIV, and an often irreversible loss of dignity and self-esteem.

We must therefore work together to make our country safer for women, children, persons with disability and other vulnerable groups.

Our message is clear. The attacks, abuse, rape and killing of women and children are cruel,

inhumane and degrading.

We call upon women to report the cases of abuse and violence. Do not protect the perpetrators. Family members and neighbours must also work with the police to catch the culprits.

We also appeal to our courts to hand down harsh sentences to those found guilty. This violence against women and children cannot be isolated from or removed from the general problem of violence in our country.

Some people in our country tend to use violence to achieve their goals. Even when protesting, which is a democratic right, some of our people will resort to violence and violate the rights of others. We need to confront this problem and begin to eradicate the culture of violence. Government has done a lot to contribute to a culture of no violence against women and children.

Our country has laws designed to deal with violence against women and children such as the Domestic Violence Act, Sexual Offences Act and the Criminal Procedures Act which must be used to fight this scourge.

The amendment of our criminal procedure law resulted in laws that restricted bail or demanded life sentence for accused persons and those found guilty of rape of young children.

Beyond the laws, we also need to look at socio-economic conditions which make women vulnerable. Unemployment forces some women to remain in relationships that are not conducive to their health and wellbeing.

If a woman depends on the abuser for housing and general living expenses, they are unlikely to act and report a violent partner to the police or to walk out on them to protect their lives and that of the children.

Women are also marginalised in terms of access to land, credit and finance, which makes them prone to violence and abuse.

The advancement of the economic empowerment of women is thus critical for us to fight the scourge of abuse and violence.

I have instructed the economic cluster of Ministers to ensure that all their programmes contain activities that are beneficial to women.

We urge the private sector as well to ensure that the employment and advancement of women is prioritised.

The promotion of women so that they play a role in the management and control of the means of production is also critical.

The extension of social services to improve the quality of life is also critical. This includes water, electricity, health care, education and transport. These will improve the lives of women and reduce their vulnerability.

Within the security cluster, work continues to assist in stopping violence against women.

Since August 2013, forty (40) regional courts around the country have been upgraded into Sexual Offences Courts and are fully operational. The re-birth of these specialized courts has contributed to the increase of the conviction rate in sexual offences.

The rate has gone up from fifty nine percent in the 2013-2014 financial year to sixty four

percent in the 2014-2015 financial year.

Likewise, in 2014-2015 the regional courts linked to the Thuthuzela Care Centres reported an increased conviction rate of 68% in these cases. The conviction rate had been sixty percent the previous year.

We have made progress as well with regards to the sex offender register. Many more of the convicted sex offenders are restricted from working or doing business in areas that will expose them to children and persons with mental disability.

Since 2012, the entries of sex offenders in the National Register for Sex Offenders took a dramatic increase from three thousand five hundred and twenty six to seventeen thousand five hundred (17 500) last year.

As at 30 October 2015, this figure has further increased to twenty one thousand four hundred and ninety five (21 495) registered sex offenders.

To promote a justice system that is user friendly to victims, government through the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development has deployed one hundred and sixty one (161) intermediaries spread over all Dedicated Sexual Offences Courts.

It has also installed three hundred and twenty four (324) Closed Circuit TV Systems, forty nine One-Way Mirrors and established two hundred and twenty two (222) Child Testifying Rooms. It is our wish to see all criminal courts equipped with these gadgets. The re-establishment of the Sexual Offences Courts also is one of the measures to increase conviction of perpetrators.

The South Police Service (SAPS) has refurbished Victim Friendly Rooms at police stations. The rooms offer privacy to victims so that they are interviewed and have statements taken confidentially.

The number of established victim friendly rooms currently is nine hundred and eighty nine (989) nation-wide.

The SAPS has also trained more than six thousand (6000) members within the Family Violence, Child Protection and Sexual Offences Units nationally on various aspects of dealing with sexual offences.

The question of child support or maintenance is critical to the stability of households with children. We have and continue to work earnestly to improve the maintenance system in the country so that children cared for as stated in the Constitution.

I signed into law the Maintenance Amendment Act in September 2015 to so that we can deal decisively with maintenance defaulters and make parents look after their children, especially fathers.

According to the Maintenance Amendment Act, if a person has defaulted on paying maintenance, their personal details will be submitted to the credit bureau.

This will prevent maintenance defaulters from continuing to receive credit while owing maintenance. This is important because lack of child support is a contributory factor to vulnerability that causes violence against women.

Let me reiterate women and anyone who is abused, including men, must report abuse to the authorities.

Government has established a 24 hour Gender-Based Violence Command Centre which is run by the Department of Social Development. The toll free call centre provides support and counselling to victims of gender-based violence and is managed by qualified social workers.

To date, the toll free line has received thirty four thousand seven hundred and nineteen (34 719) calls. Out of these, five thousand one hundred and forty six (5 146) calls related specifically to gender-based violence.

The centre was recognised globally as the Best Technology Innovation Contact Centre in the World for 2015, when it won an international award in the United States.

In addition, the department is establishing safe houses to accommodate victims of gender based violence and had child and youth care centres to accommodate abused children who require removal from their abusive environment.

Compatriots,

The Constitution of the Republic of South African prohibits discrimination on the basis of gender and sexual orientation amongst others. Having noticed that crimes against the lesbians, gays and transgendered individuals are perpetuated against them because of their sexual orientation, government established a National Task Team on violence against this specific group.

South Africa is said to be the source, transit and destination for trafficking in persons due to its development and the fact that it connects Africa to the world and vice versa.

While men and boys are also, the majority of trafficked persons are women and girls. We urge communities to be vigilant. If people come to you and offer to find a job for you or education far away for your child they may be wanting to traffic your child.

Let us not lose sight of our children. We must know where they are at all times.

Compatriots,

Government cannot win this war working alone.

On this special day allow me to commend the efforts of non-governmental organisations, churches, labour unions and community formations that are active in supporting government's programme against the abuse of women and children. Thank you for your dedication, time, your passion and your hard work.

Government cannot win this battle working alone.

I want to take this opportunity to ask you to partner with us as we roll out the national and provincial dialogues during the campaign.

Our message today to the country is Count Me In. Let each one of use do something to eliminate violence against women and children!

Let us say no to violence, to abuse, to bullying of women and children. Let us report incidents of violence when it takes place in our communities. It is not a private matter.

Together let us work for a society where we no longer read or hear about the abuse that women and children often suffer at the hands of heartless perpetrators.

A society where they are safe at home, at school and at work.

A society where children play safely outside and women walk freely in the streets.

This is the society we should work for.

It is my honour and privilege to declare the campaign of 16 days of activism of no violence against women and children officially opened.

I thank you.

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**Issued by: The Presidency**