

## Men's March Held at Nseleni sports grounds - 26 November 2010

26 November 2010, Empangeni

"We will only succeed in rooting out crime and related social ills if we start in each and every household, every street and every ward," says the MEC for Health Dr Sibongiseni Dhlomo during the Men's march held at Nseleni Township in the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal. "For this to succeed it requires decisive leadership from all sectors of our society."



The MEC is leading a Men's March organised by various sectors in the uThungulu District. The march is attended by hundreds of men from the township and surrounding areas as well as Mayors, Izinduna zezinsizwa, faith leaders, organised men's groups and other civil society organisations. It is a result of community frustration and anger over the rate of crime and its feminisation. A number of incidences of crime have plagued the area including the stealing of computers from the local clinic, hijacking and shooting of a female doctor who was visiting the local clinic to provide medical care, hijacking of three mobile clinics and break in into government offices leading to their closure.

It is estimated that a woman born in South Africa has a greater chance of being raped than learning how to read. One in three of the 4,000 women questioned by the Community of Information, Empowerment and Transparency said they had been raped in the past year. South Africa has some of the highest incidences of child and baby rape. More than 25% of a sample of 1,738 South African men from the KwaZulu-Natal and Eastern Cape Provinces admitted when anonymously questioned to raping someone; of those, nearly half said they had raped more than one person, according to a policy brief issued by the Medical Research Council (MRC).

Child welfare groups believe that the number of unreported incidents could be up to 10 times the number of reported rape cases. A Social worker, who helps child victims in the KwaZulu-Natal, said: "Child abusers are often relatives of their victims - even their fathers and providers."

The march has been organised to coincide with the 16 Days of Activism Against Women and Children in order to call on communities to stand up and unite against crime which is affecting mainly women and children. In this township, and possibly many like it, it is believed that an increase in crime and violence is well recognised. It is believed that it may be due to displacements following many years of violence and the loss of community structures.

The Department of Health's District Manager Mr. Mfowethu Zungu explains the problems and says; "It is mainly women and children who bear the scars of crime and violence. Crime committed under conditions of poor social cohesion is often systematic and intended to terrorize the community, break up families, destroy communities, and, in some instances, change the make-up of the next generation. Sometimes it is also used to render women from the targeted community incapable. "

The Community Healthcare Centre in the area is seeing a high number of assault, stabbing and gunshot cases. "In the current year we have seen 808 assault, 49 gunshot and 493 stabbing cases. While the reported rape cases are not that high, two since the beginning of the year, we know that,

through our home visits, a worrisome number does not report. These people we encounter during home visits. This is our major concern!" Mr. Zungu continues.

Mr. Zungu mentioned that the district is largely (70%) rural and there is great adherence to traditional customs and traditions. The march, he said, is organized in the belief that men, in particular, and all sectors of community have an important role to play in reducing crime and violence against women including preventing such violence from occurring in the first place. He said that health is specially placed to ensure that women and girls who suffer from violence have access to appropriate care and services.

To mark the 16 days of Activism Against Women and Child Abuse, Dr Dhlomo urges leaders to be decisive. He called on leaders from all sectors to be organised and recognised in the fight against all social ills especially crime and the abuse of women and children. "It has been reported previously - unfortunately we have not had any reports to the contrary - that on a daily basis in schools across the country, girls of every race and economic class encounter sexual violence and harassment at school that impedes their realisation of the right to education," states Dr Dhlomo. "Our girls continue to be raped, sexually abused, sexually harassed, and assaulted at school by male classmates and teachers. For many women and girls, violence and abuse are an inevitable part of their social environment."

The MEC said that the message of government is to call for decisive leadership as efforts to root out crime and violence (of any form) are being stepped up. Together with the efforts to prevent violence against women and there is a parallel need to respond to their health needs of those who have experienced violence. "In the few months that passed we announced the new policy where we intend providing post exposure prophylaxis –antiretroviral drugs – to all victims of sexual assault without having to ask them to report to the police first. Besides having to face the incident of rape, they are also exposed to HIV and unwanted pregnancies," says the Dr Dhlomo. "With this policy we intend ensuring that no woman or child suffers a double jeopardy of a rape and a lifetime with HIV infection."

The MEC stressed the critical need for government and community groups to take joint action to curb violence against women, in particular.

ENDS

ISSUED BY:

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH: KWAZULU-NATAL  
CORPORATE COMMUNICATIONS