

ZIMBABWE BRIEFING

a crisis in zimbabwe coalition regional office weekly report
Special Edition



29 November 2013

In Public, I was Never Defenceless - in Private I was Never Defended



Delta Milayo Ndou

As a columnist challenging patriarchy, social norms and the status quo – I inevitably attracted a lot of harsh criticism, which I took in my stride as being part of the process of bringing uncomfortable topics to the center of public discourse.

I am not sure about her motives with regards storming into my work place and going so far as to demand an interview with the vernacular Ndebele newspaper called Umthunywa where she cornered a student reporter and aired all of my husband's dirty laundry whilst dragging my name through the muck and leaving whatever respect I commanded in the newsroom shredded beyond repair.

I cannot begin to describe the sense of utter humiliation the incident caused especially as the husband at the centre of the whole mess was conveniently stationed out of town and thus spared the ignominy of that vile visit which was heralded by insults hurled at me for the great crime of being married to a man this woman had been led to believe was unmarried and available for the claiming.

I was and am still known for being outspoken, assertive and embracing feminist ideals insofar as they seek to elevate the status of women and challenge patriarchy in its varied manifestations, particularly the inferiorization of women as a social group.

I remember the husband coming back home to me from his work base, very unapologetic and quite unperturbed that his small house whom he had impregnated and promised God-knows-what had decided to show up at my workplace and make a public spectacle of me in a bid to legitimize her own claim on him.

Regardless of which direction the attack came from or how vicious it was, I was never defenceless because I have never apologized for my views and in those instances where I wrote from my lived experience; I was content in the knowledge that my lived experience is non-negotiable and cannot be contested by those who have not lived it.

Gender based violence as it is articulated and appreciated in our societies and in our lives often is centred around physical scars – the outward markings of torn flesh, wounded bodies, broken limbs and bruised skin – when daily many married women in Zimbabwe contend with a more profoundly tragic violation of their hearts, souls and minds in the form of unrepentant husbands who have illicit affairs that expose them to societal shame, scorn, derision and the demeaning of their dignities.

Beyond these convictions, I always understood the attacks on my work to be merely the playing out of ideological contestation and whilst my ideas mattered to me, I never felt that they should be exempted from scrutiny, criticism and rebuttal. In those instances when the attacks strayed from scrutinizing the ideas I was advancing and became personal missiles aimed at degrading, demeaning and humiliating me – I fought back the best way I knew how – by writing some more because I discovered that when I write no one can shut me up.

As long as I could write, I could never be defenceless.

I thrived in the public sphere because my talents were recognized and rewarded by a system in which ideas were a legitimate currency and dialogue was an acceptable means of articulating varying points of views. So being in the public eye, being viewed as an opinion leader and attracting controversy by daring to speak up against the patriarchal edifice, I learned not to show weakness and the weakness I strove so hard to conceal was an unhappy marriage that I entered into too young owing to the folly of an unplanned pregnancy.

He did not defend me at all or attempt to correct the misconceptions he had created around his true marital status. Not once. Through the midnight calls in which that woman taunted me, throughout the text messages laden with vulgarities and spite, throughout the court cases in which I sought and gained a peace order against her barring her from calling my matrimonial home, coming to my house or my place of business – throughout all the abuse – he said and did nothing in my defence.

One day, amidst my thriving public life, my private life rudely intruded in the form of my husband's small house who woke up one morning, provoked by God-knows-what and chose to cause a scene at my workplace. From what I gathered at the time, my husband had deceitfully failed to disclose that he was married and she had fallen in love with him and was quite invested in a future he had sworn that they would build together. She was deceived by my husband and in many ways, so was I.

This man whom I had placed at the centre of my universe, whom I had lain in bed with, whose child I had carried as a mere teenager, whose love I had trusted and believed in and who had managed to convince me that I needed him more than I needed my next breath of air – he did nothing and said nothing in my defence.

I am a divorced woman now, defiantly so. Because to attain this status, I had to start defending myself in the private space with the same fervency and vigour with which I had defended myself and my ideas in the public space. I woke up one day and realized no one would fight for me and that those who had a desire to fight for me because they wished better for me could only do so much. I came to the realization that I was as defenceless as I chose to be.

Perhaps divorce ought to be considered a human right because without it – so much harm is inflicted and so much pain needlessly endured in attempts to conform to social conventions of what marriage entails.

The institution of marriage needs to undergo a transformation that emphasizes peace over violence, love over ego, respect over dominance and honesty over deception; until then gender-based violence will remain a scourge in the homes and a blight to society.

By Delta Milayo Ndou. She writes in her personal capacity.

If there is a violence that goes beyond the imprint of a slap on a woman's face, if there is a violence that breaks something more integral than a rib in a woman's chest, if there is a violence that breaches something more intrinsically personal than a virgin's hymen – it is the violation of a woman's hopes and dreams and trust and love and soul and body all poured into and invested in her marriage. To violate such an investment, is to kill a person even while their heart continues to beat, it is to asphyxiate them while their lungs continue to draw breathe and it is to destroy everything they believe and take for granted about the goodness of humanity.

Gender based violence as it is articulated and appreciated in our societies and in our lives often is centered around physical scars – the outward markings of torn flesh, wounded bodies, broken limbs and bruised skin – when daily many married women in Zimbabwe contend with a more profoundly tragic violation of their hearts, souls and minds in the form of unrepentant husbands who have illicit affairs that expose them to societal shame, scorn, derision and the demeaning of their dignities.

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I am defiant about being happy and willing to pay any price for it – including the price of divorcing. To secure a measure of peace in my life, I am more than willing to pay the price of being a divorcee with all its attendant consequences such as the labelling and the fear and the public admonishment that comes with breaking with convention.

Yes, I left! I learned that it is as important, if not more important; to be safe in private as I relatively was in the public realm. I learned to jealously guard and defend my right to a peaceful existence rather than allow myself to become a casualty of the choices of other people including a husband who kept deciding to stray and drag other women into our marriage.

In public, I was never defenceless, in private I was never defended until I learned that we must live as we believe... or not at all. I wish my ex-husband well and hope he has matured over the years but I refused to continue footing that emotional bill he kept accruing in our marriage through bad and selfish choices that placed both our health and lives at risk.

I chose to seek peace and I found it by leaving the warzone I used to call my matrimonial home. As this 16 Days of Activism against Gender based Violence continues, I hope women and men stop allowing themselves to become casualties of the bad choices made by unrepentant partners.

This 16-Day Campaign should be OUR personal 365-Day Campaign.



Cynthia F Manjoro

I recently read the heart-wrenching story of Saartjie Baartman, a 20-year-old African woman who made headlines in 19th Century Europe as the "Hottentot Venus." Saartjie who was born in 1789, was orphaned and worked as a slave in Cape Town. She was "discovered" by Alexander Dunlop, a military surgeon who persuaded her to go to Europe with him.

We just stood there, helplessly watching them jeer at us while we impatiently waited for them to allow us to put our clothes back on. Lock up usually took about ten minutes as they counted to make sure everyone was there; but on that day, they took their time to count while leering and exchanging crude jokes.

When we finally got into our cell, everyone was quiet and the two older women got into their blankets and wept. The rest of us were too stunned and we simply could not do anything about it, save for sitting in stunned, tormented silence.

The prison was my home for that time; being the only space I had and suddenly, that space had violated me. It had violated all of us. I would have understood a strip search; could have excused it for the guards doing their job. But that day's experience left a scar so deep, so ugly, thinking about it brings tears to my eyes and heaviness in my heart. It made me realize though, that gender-based violence is not just between the sexes, it could easily happen within the sexes.

Dunlop's intention was to put her on show because of what were viewed to be highly unusual bodily features and he promised her some of the proceeds from these shows. For the next four years, she was on show in Europe and after a case by the abolitionists relating to her sideshow was thrown out of the courts, she was moved to Paris where she survived for only a year.

Baartman was treated as a freak by the Europeans, and they used the title "Hottentot" in reference to her, which was an indication of the derogatory and inferior way in which the Khoisan were viewed by the Europeans. She was also named "Venus" after the Greek goddess of love though this was a parody of the disdain with which she was treated.

Her story brought to mind all the non-physical forms of violence women face every day. So much has been said about beatings that women have had to endure yet so little is said about the scars they get in the absence of the physical fights. For me, her story conjured up memories of the first time during my nine month stay in prison when the guards ordered everyone to strip before going into our cells at the end of the day.

Routinely, at three o'clock in the afternoon, we were required to stand in two lines, wait to be counted and were locked in for the rest of the day. In the absence of watches and phones, we understood the approach of that time by the position of the sun. It was 2012 and as always, at the appropriate time, we stood in the queue like we were supposed to.

The section where I stayed was enclosed and had two holding cells. Our cell had eleven people while the other one had about sixteen. Two of us in the section were on remand while the rest were convicted. Back to the day in question, we were waiting to get counted at the end of an eventful day. One of the convicted prisoners had been involved in a misdemeanor and we were all eager to go and talk about what would become of her.

When the prison guards arrived, they instructed us all to take our uniforms off and to stand clad in our undergarments. Anyone who has been to prison knows how little was left on. Now, having gone to an all-girls' school, I had no problems with doing that among my peers.

However, our cell had two women who were a lot older than my mother. These women made it a point to bath after we had so that they don't meet us inside the ablution facilities. But on that day, they were forced to strip with the rest of us in the queue. We all did as ordered but to add insult to injury, the female prison officers responsible for lock down on that day started to jeer at people. I'm sure the indignity we suffered on that day is similar to that which Saartjie had to contend with every day that she was in Europe. We were powerless; we could only just stand there and listen to the prison officials make jokes about our bodies while we stood on display. To say I was humiliated is an understatement; it doesn't even describe the mental torment I endured.

And the state of the security sector in the country means we had nowhere to go to complain. A complaint could easily translate to conditions worsening for every prisoner and no one was willing to take the initiative. Moreover, we knew that the guards could always use the excuse of a search so we couldn't win.

In our cell, some hours later, we spoke of the unfairness of it; but then, a lot of things in life are unfair. I met, in prison, a young lady who is a few years younger than me. She was a mother of one then, a little girl aged two. She had been married for two years to an abusive man. He beat her up when he was drunk and she stayed; for love, her marriage and her daughter. And she cared about what people would say about her ability to stay in a marriage.

One day, after her husband came home senselessly drunk, he started to beat her up while they were in the kitchen. On that day, however, she decided to fight back. She wasn't prepared to take the beatings anymore. Instinctively, she picked the thing closest to her, which at that point happened to be a knife. She stabbed him once in the chest and ran for her life. He husband was hurt but fortunately, he lived. He spent two days in hospital during which time his relatives had her arrested for attempted murder. She had been in custody for nine months, awaiting trial, while hoping that the High Court would call her in for her bail application. Her daughter was at her aunt's house and she hadn't seen her the whole time.

This was not an isolated case. One of the mental patients whom we spent most of our afternoons with had been a victim of physical violence. Unfortunately, she did not get out in time. Before prison, she was a normal working woman who was raising a family. It took just one battering, during which he continuously beat her head against a wall to leave her a mental patient for life. I used to love spending time with her when she was in her element because she had lived an inspiring life and had a lot to tell. She was also very witty and entertaining.

In light of my experiences, gender-based violence is, for me, a personal issue. I've seen its effects and I've felt them. And I've imagined what it would be like to have that happen to my sister, my mother or my friend. I'm sure that if more people personalized it, we could go a long way in eradicating it. The first step is to make our homes a safe space for women because the world will not always be one. Our hearts should bleed when we see victims of violence and the survivors who have emerged with the scars we cannot see.

By Cynthia F. Manjoro. She writes in her personal capacity.

“Bath him, feed him, what about me?”



Tatenda Mazarura

“Helen McCarter has everything a woman wants: a nice house and rich husband. After 18 years as a devoted wife and homemaker, Helen McCarter is physically dragged from her luxurious home by her husband, Charles, to make room for his long-time mistress—and the kids he shares with her. A distraught Helen turns to her mother, grandmother Madea and cousin Brian who takes her in and turns back to God.”

Various reasons explain why most women, especially in patriarchal societies would rather be abused and stay married than leave their husbands and be “supposedly free.” Women in patriarchal societies stay in abusive relationships due to cultural norms and values which oppose divorce, stigmatise single mothers and encourage any woman who has children to stay married to their husbands.

“The truth is for as long as we are comfortable and continue to want to be associated with success and being in a relationship, a woman will toil and soldier on. I have never been in an abusive relationship, thank God. I cannot really say I would pack my belongings and move on with my life. If a man cheats on you, it is a form of abuse. We break up and say never will I date a man but two weeks later we get back together and claim a forgiving heart. I would never recommend a woman to reconcile with a beast of a woman abuser but I really don't know why these women hold on. You can only be beaten up for so long. Death is what we fear for our abused fellow women,” argued one respondent.

Helen learns for the first time in her life to stand up on her two feet and is ready to remove herself from her relationship with Charles and move on with Orlando. But when her husband is almost killed by a vengeful client, the mistress leaves Charles and Helen rushes back to look after him. Helen wonders if she has the heart to forgive him despite everything.” (Story line of the movie, *Diary of a Mad Black Woman*, by Tyler Perry).

Why do women in abusive relationships stay? Are they too weak, helpless or they lack self-esteem to the extent that they believe they will never find somebody else to love and treat them in the manner they deserve. Abuse in an intimate relationship (which is the focus of this paper) can happen to anyone, strong or weak, out-spoken or reserved, empowered or non-empowered and often times, women in such abusive relations are usually ignorant, in denial, ashamed or fearful. Though it is bound to happen to anyone, it is often overlooked, excused or denied especially when it is psychological rather than physical. Lesego Motsepe (a South African actress) defines abuse as;

“Not just physical bashing. Verbal outbursts, demeaning comments, violation of one's sexual space and financial dependency for essential basic needs – all these make abuse a matter that keeps women imprisoned as they fear revealing what happens behind closed doors.”

Just the other day I was having a conversation with my “sisters” trying to figure out why women stay in abusive relationships and it was interesting to note that most of us women are in denial, we just can't accept that the sweetest guy who promised to love and protect us, our “Prince Charming” has turned into a dreaded monster who abuses us physically, verbally and emotionally. We always want to believe the person we married or fell in love with is still there somewhere, everything will be alright, it will work out eventually and they will change and get back to their senses and start loving and respecting us again.

Over the years, we have witnessed a disturbing increase in the number of gender based violence cases which have resulted in numerous divorces, murder and suicide. A number of men and women have been incarcerated for killing their partners or for being caught up in violent misunderstandings due to rivalry for affection. Our annual statistics on such violence are a sign that we need urgent intervention, not just on paper and not just during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence, but a long lasting permanent solution.

In Zimbabwe and most African countries as well as many other patriarchal societies, domestic violence has remained rampant owing to societal values which have been inclined towards overshadowing women's transformation. The social construction of gender results from the way societies have organized work and distributed resources, including power. Whilst men and women are affected by violence, veracity indicates that it is women who are severely affected by the occurrence of violence.

It is therefore difficult for abused women to come out in the open or to resist violence from their husbands hence they tolerate their husbands' abusive tendencies as it is the easier option as opposed to terminating their marriage. As long as one tolerates the first signs of abuse or the first physical bashing, be assured that it won't be the last. Another lady I interviewed expressed a lot of emotion and suggested that in as much as one is abused, they are in love and it may not be that easy to just walk out adding;

“No one has the right to treat another like trash. But unfortunately there are those who have been dealt a bad hand. And they don't know how to get out. They don't have the guts and they don't have a plan to get out but they want out. With most of these relationships the guy just doesn't wake up and abuse you from the get go, it develops gradually. And the problem with things that develop gradually is in the process it's also killing the victim's confidence gradually. And they sort of get used to it and tolerate it and keep hoping the man they fell in love with will come back.”

Traditionally, most men used violence to discipline their wives and it was accepted in most cultures. Such an act has been deep rooted to the extent that most women accept abuse as a form of love and or disciplinary action. There is also cultural clash which involves pitting so called tradition against modernity. Our society is in transition and in some cases, it is not yet fully accepted that most forms of what are now legally codified as ‘abuse’, do constitute abuse. This includes some women themselves who advise fellow women either as grandmothers, aunts, sisters, mothers or friends.

Some women in abusive relationships do not themselves believe that they are being abused in as far as their specific cultural and religious contexts are concerned. They believe it is acceptable. I am appealing to all the women out there, if a man lays his hand on you, no-matter what the circumstances are, it is abuse not love. Take a stand, seek assistance or leave that abusive relationship pronto, before it's too late. Any form of abuse should not be tolerated, let your partner know that certain things they do are abusive and if they do not show any remorse or change, you are better off without them. Most of us feel that people deserve second chances but one should always draw the line as to how many chances a person can get. You don't want to be giving fifty chances, life is too short. After all, you only live once.

I however understand why most women who are in abusive relationships stay, he could be everything they ever hoped for. But you are only leaving room for manipulation, and the longer you stay, the more complicated it gets and the harder it is to leave, your clouded judgement only becomes foggier.

Abusive men usually work on destroying your self-esteem first, they make you feel like you are nothing without them and only they can fulfil you, and once that happens I think leaving becomes the scariest thing ever. I have been in an emotionally abusive relationship, he would cheat on me with dozens of women but whenever we were “double-crossed” he would tell the other girl that I am his official girlfriend, that made me feel special not knowing I was being abused

all the way. He did that to me more than five times and even married and wedded another woman and still came back and I took him since he claimed I was the love of his life, until it dawned on me and I left him. Now I am free because I moved on, it wasn't easy though."

Some of the reasons why a woman might stay in an abusive relationship as revealed from the discussion include;

- ◆ *Believing Abuse is Normal: one doesn't know what a healthy relationship looks like; perhaps from growing up in an environment where abuse was common, one may not realize that one is in an unhealthy relationship.*
- ◆ *Lack of Money: one might have become financially dependent on one's abusive partner. Without money, it can seem impossible for one to leave the relationship.*
- ◆ *Pregnancy or Parenting: one may feel pressure to raise one's children with both parents together, even if that means staying in an abusive relationship. Also, the abusive partner may threaten to take or harm the children if one leaves - some women are just that dedicated to keeping the family together.*
- ◆ *Pressure from family: some women are taught that it is their job to maintain the relationship and support their partners, so they may feel guilty about leaving or feel they have "failed."*
- ◆ *Cultural, societal and religious perspectives: women should stay married to their husbands, single mothers and divorced women are stigmatised therefore women are abused, they forgive and they fight for their marriages/relationships and move on with their lives.*
- ◆ *Denial: if you are in the situation you either deny it is happening or you give your partner excuses to the extent of even blaming yourself, justify and believe they will change rather than leave.*

Conclusively, the greatest challenge that we face is the fact that most women are very good at keeping up appearances so much that it is difficult to know who is and who is not in an abusive relationship. There is need to encourage women to come out and talk about these issues, because the sad thing is often times we only learn that one is in an abusive relationship when it is already too late. In some extreme cases women are driven to take their own lives or they are beaten to death only because they could not speak out on their experience.

Every woman has been abused one way or another because sometimes most women only realise that they were being abused when they are out of the relationship. Most women and girls are practically "raped" the first time they have sex because there is use of coercion in most cases, but because they are so in love with this guy they do not realise it.

There are many other forms of abuse which include being stalked, a partner who is overly possessive and wants to control your every move, a partner who secludes you and so on. One may not realise it then and not being aware that one is being abused doesn't mean there is no abuse, but as long as that person is comfortable it becomes very difficult for anyone to assist but eventually they will realise it though it may be too late to do much.

Economic circumstances no doubt contribute immensely to gender based violence. Without empowering women, they are forced to bottle up emotions and be secretive about it. It is often the case that women withdraw charges against abusive spouses in courts for fear of loss of livelihoods. To that end, empowering the girl child is very critical to make possible a generation of women that will not have to sacrifice themselves in abusive relationships simply because they depend on man to make ends meet.

As we celebrate yet another 16 days of activism against gender based violence, women, you are reminded not to tolerate any form of abuse, overt or covert, there is no excuse for abuse. Gender activists and all concerned also need to come up with home grown approaches to addressing some of these challenges by engaging with the women themselves especially at grassroots level for sustainable solutions.

Gender activists and all concerned also need to come up with home grown approaches to addressing some of these challenges by engaging with the women themselves especially at grassroots level for sustainable solutions. The tendency has been to 'import' foreign approaches including foisting international norms, conventions and resolutions that do not necessarily fit local, specific contexts. This is not to suggest that it is bad to move with global trends, but results will be best achieved if they are adapted to suit our own circumstances, with reasonable time lines or targets.

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"What you tolerate you perpetuate. You train people how to treat you by what you allow over and over again.." Paula White

By Tatenda Mazarura. She writes in her personal capacity.

Changing the mind-set; key towards the elimination of Gender Based Violence



Memory Kadau

Galvanized by the Beijing platform, a surge of action was triggered in many countries since the early 2000s and Zimbabwe has seen a number of legal frameworks and policies put in place to promote gender equality, gender equity and protect the rights of women.

The Government of Zimbabwe has also shown its commitment through the signing and ratification of a number of regional and international conventions and protocols which include Convention on the Elimination of all

Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the SADC Protocol on Gender and Development among others. Furthermore the passing onto law of the Domestic Violence Act, the Sexual Offences Act, and Legal Age of Majority Act, the review of the second National Gender Policy (2013-17) should also be commended.

Non-governmental organisations, pressure groups and activists have also been contributing immensely towards gender equality, empowerment of women and elimination of Gender based violence (GBV) through different initiatives across the country. However the above actions and implementation of the laws have not been without failures, challenges and limitations.

As we commemorate the 16 days of activism against gender based violence lets bear in mind that the fight against gender based violence should be sustained throughout our lives, therefore action should start by making our homes safe spaces. We can all be ambassadors of peace and campaigners against gender based violence by changing our thinking as mothers, fathers, guardians, brothers or sisters and stop giving preferential treatment to one gender against the other. Let's think about the societal norms and values that we are reinforcing in our sons and daughters. Are we role models?

A research conducted by the Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network (2012) highlighted that domestic violence accounts for more than 60% of murder cases that go through the High Court in Harare. It is estimated one in four women in Zimbabwe are violated in their lifetime. While GBV can be female on male, most reports indicate that it is largely male on female. Gender based violence still remains one of the social ills that communities continuously grapple with on a daily basis.

In the wake of commemorating 16 days of activism against gender based violence, running under the theme ' From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's Challenge Militarism and End Violence against Women' the numerous cases of gender based violence reported daily in our mainstream media cannot go without a flinch.

- ◆ *A year ago the private and public media was awash with reports of a group of women randomly abducting, raping and collecting men's semen.*

◆ *Harare businessman shoots girlfriend, kills self, Daily News, 21 August 2013.*

◆ *Woman burns husband, kills self, The Herald, 16 October 2013.*

◆ *Caretaker rapes girl (1) alleges her granny abused him, 3 November 2013.*

These have become the expected and accepted stories from our communities. Sometimes we know the victim or perpetrator or sometimes we are the victim or perpetrator. The biggest question is WHY, what is WRONG and what has happened to humanity. Has violence become an acceptable and civilised form of conflict resolution in our homes? Have we accepted repugnant actions such as rape, torture, murder, physical and emotional abuse that have invaded our homes and left us and our loved ones traumatised?

As we commemorate the 16 days of activism against gender based violence lets bear in mind that the fight against gender based violence should be sustained throughout our lives, therefore action should start by making our homes safe spaces. We can all be ambassadors of peace and campaigners against gender based violence by changing our thinking as mothers, fathers, guardians, brothers or sisters and stop giving preferential treatment to one gender against the other. Let's think about the societal norms and values that we are reinforcing in our sons and daughters. Are we role models?

Gender based violence is perpetuated by societal practices and acceptance of violence as a mode of social interaction and political interface in communities. Let's start by challenging oppressive inheritance laws, virginity tests, child marriages, unequal access to education among other oppressive practices that are rooted in our own socio-economic, political and cultural spheres. A holistic approach which seeks the commitment of all us is needed to address the issues of Gender Based Violence bedevilling our communities.

Charlotte Bunch concludes by challenging us that *violence against women and girls is the most pervasive violation of human rights in the world today. Its forms are both subtle and blatant and its impact on development profound. But it is so deeply embedded in cultures around the world that it is almost invisible. Yet this brutality is not inevitable. Once recognized for what it is — a construct of power and a means of maintaining the status quo — it can be dismantled.* By playing our part, changing mind-sets, peace in our homes to peace in the world can become a reality.

By Memory Kadau. She writes in her personal capacity.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence: From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World, Let us Challenge Militarism and End Violence Against Women



Sally Dura

The reality of violence against women in Zimbabwe is rooted in militarism where the army, the police and informal youth gangs in communities remain the machinery for ensuring that citizens comply and participate in development processes in a stage managed way. The theatre of militarism has mostly been election times where political parties' campaigns are manned by all forms of violence in pursuit of power. Militarism in Zimbabwe continues to be a catalyst for violence against Women with impunity.

Poor resource allocation to gender mainstreaming ministries, state organs, government departments, reduces the planned actions and programmes to mere blueprints as there is no resources for implementation thus progress cannot be made. Additionally, a lack of faith in the justice delivery system due to corruption and limited capacity to deliver for survivors of violence have made women lose confidence in reporting cases of violence.

Some religious and cultural practices remain a hindrance to successful reorganization of the society to disband structures of violence and to implement initiatives to address gender based violence. Lack of political will by national leaders remains a challenge as nothing beyond lip-service materializes with regards to transforming society and governance style or creating a conducive environment without militarism and violence.

Governments' commitments and initiatives to ending violence against women continue to lag behind the needs and realities for women and girls. Resources allocated are inadequate and necessary institutional and policy reforms and alignment drag on at the expense of addressing women's rights.

The annual global campaign to end violence against women and girls remains critical despite the continuation of violence against women and girls with impunity. As 16 Days of activism against gender based violence campaign continues the status quo of women remains low, the systems of governance remain autocratic and militaristic.

It is that time of the year again where the Vibe is all about amplifying voices and energies to affirm that gender based violence is still a critical area of concern affecting sustainable development. The Vibe comes with reflections that take stock of the status quo in regards to progress on all initiatives being implemented. Challenging militarism to end violence against women and children is everyone's responsibility. Let us all take action to work together in our diversity on zero tolerance to gender based violence. From Peace in the Home to Peace in the World: Let's Challenge Militarism and End Violence against Women!"

At the end of the day, all rights have responsibilities therefore women should report all incidences of violence and governments should honour their pledges to ensuring the advancement of women's rights whereas civic society should mainstream addressing gender based violence in all programmes and activities.

We all have what it takes to stop violence against women and children, let us take action to make it happen. Let us challenge militarism and guarantee a violence free Zimbabwe.

By Sally Dura. She writes in her personal capacity.

Different phases of Militarism in the lives of women of the Republic of Zimbabwe have normalized the use of violence to enforce and influence participation in all development processes. It has created an impression of normalcy such that at any given point one who assumes power over others feels compelled to be violent to show that they are in power and to instill discipline or force loyalty to them.

With Zimbabwe being 33 years old, the independence of the nation remains in conflict with the realities as the structures of government, the institution and the processes of government remain evident of militaristic style. Regional and international commitments by the government of Zimbabwe pledge to ensure the advancement of women's rights but no tangible efforts have been witnessed in which there are structural reforms to ensure addressing militarism as a catalyst to violence against women.

Militarism manifestations remain institutionalized across generations, as at community level there exists organized youth gangs especially at election time. Despite the new constitution being progressive with regards increasing women's participation in leadership and decision-making, fear remains a limiting factor. Militarism as a model is used to scare women from national decision making processes and elections. Women begin to shy away from politics and feel that politics is violent and is for men. Men in political parties manipulate women, deny them information that is vital for their equal participation and deprive them access to power.

Violence against women is addressed by many state and non-state institutions focusing on domestic violence whilst women's rights organisations, development agencies and the Ministry of Women Affairs, Gender and Community Development have implemented a number of initiatives to raise awareness and advocate for legal and health services for survivors of violence. Violence against women in public places remains normalized as 'unlucky times of election days'. When elections come it seems the government leaders invest energies in power retention at the expense of addressing what makes women and girls vulnerable to violence during their campaigns and the election period as a whole.

Various initiatives at national, regional and international level are being implemented by state and non-state institutions to end violence against women although lack of adequate resources continues to be a limiting factor for wide reaching prevention of gender based violence initiatives.

Addressing violence against women and girls is also not rooted in the focusing of transforming relevant government institutions or changing the negative attitudes of service providers.

Lack of a structured, systematic and well resourced gender mainstreaming mechanism in all institutions and initiatives to address violence against women present a challenge where gender issues and experiences of men and women are not central to strategies towards ending violence against women.