

## **Musasa Project organizes a gathering against gender based violence**

Musasa Project organized an Advocacy gathering in the wake of numerous cases of femicide that were reported in the mainstream media. The cases of gender based violence (GBV) in the media had just become one painful example of what happens to women on a daily basis across the country. They served as a testimony of the existing gap between the law and its imperfect implementation. What became a brainteaser for the organization was the government's inaction in the face of this horrendous problem which made us brood over the position of women in society.

About 660 women from all walks of life gathered at the Africa Unity Square to denounce these killings. We have laws that have become nothing but toothless bulldogs as there still remains a lot to be accomplished before the right to a life without violence becomes a reality for women in Zimbabwe. A research conducted by The Zimbabwe Women Resource Centre and Network highlighted that in Zimbabwe, domestic violence accounts for more than 60% of murder cases that go through the high court in Harare. Statistics from different organisations including the print media reflect that cases of GBV are on the rise (see attached the statistics from ZRP, Adult Rape Clinic and the media statistics from media monitoring by Musasa Project).

In her opening and welcoming remarks the Director for Musasa Project, Mrs. Netty Musanhu highlighted the events that led to the gathering. She highlighted the need to reflect on what has been happening with respect to GBV in Zimbabwe. She blasted the response that society is giving to cases of femicide giving an example of Tongai Moyo's wife who killed herself when her husband brought another woman at home. Her death was quickly ignored and people concentrated on giving comfort to Tongai Moyo and yet he is the cause of the wife's death. What is nerve-racking is where the children are in all this no-one cares about their welfare, the society forgets that femicide comes forth with so many challenges that need to be addressed. She encouraged women to speak out against GBV and to be able to stand up and move out of violent relationships.

A representative from UNFPA, Helen Peters indicated that the objective of GBV programming is to eliminate all forms of GBV, be it through effect coordination, service provision, prevention of cases from happening or research, documentation and advocacy. She reiterated talked about GBV Programming in Zimbabwe and she reiterated the need to address GBV in Zimbabwe as the cases of femicide are on the increase as evidenced by the numerous cases that are reported in the print media.

On the issue of resources it was stressed that there is stiff competition and scrounging for resources by Organizations and this compromises the quality of programming and comprehensive interventions. Attention was further drawn to the fact that funding for GBV is on a short term basis which makes it difficult to plan for long term solutions. An emphasis was placed on the need for the government, donors, UN and NGO's to allocate

adequate resources to support implementation of programmes to end GBV. This would go a long way in curbing GBV in Zimbabwe as well as bring redress to survivors.

In the realization that rape was also on the increase Mrs. Kurangwa from the Adult Rape Clinic (ARC) gave a detailed report on the number of cases they have dealt with in the period of March 2009 to April 2010. The Statistics were nerve wrecking as it revealed that the numbers of women being raped and seeking for help at ARC are increasing by the day. Her presentation revealed that very few women presented themselves early for treatment after the incident of rape and she recounted how this posed as a challenge as it is difficult to terminate a pregnancy from rape when it's beyond three months.

Mrs. Kurangwa further elaborated the need for women to be well informed on what they should do when they are raped and also the importance of presenting early for treatment. She indicated the importance of having such vital information as she talked about the Post Exposure Prophylaxis (PEP) which is administered to rape survivors so that their risk of infection of HIV from the perpetrator is reduced.

The dangers and cost of GBV were explored and to bring faces to these cases two families whose loved ones were mercilessly butchered as a result of GBV gave testimonies of how these deaths had impacted their lives. With the testimonies the participants and all the responsible authorities were able to put faces to the cases of femicide so that it is demystified. The first family was the Nyamayaro family who lost a daughter seven months ago to GBV. What was so appalling was the fact that this dangerous man who is a potential threat to mankind has been placed out on bail. Seven (7) months down the line this murderer is out on bail and the relatives are lamenting the continual postponement that is happening at the Rotten Row Courts. What is more horrendous is the fact that the perpetrator admitted that he was guilty, even though at law a person facing a murder charge is not allowed to enter a plea of guilty the delay in trial proceedings fatigues the relatives for justice delayed is justice denied. This is what makes the general populace lose faith in the criminal justice system. Justice has to be attained and this is what Musasa is clamoring for, murderers should be placed behind bars.

Next to testify their horrid account was the Sabawu family which was represented by children who lost their mother. The young man who represented the family narrated their abysmal account of how they lost their mother and yet two (2) years down the line their step father has not been tried. What puzzled many is the fact that their mother was killed in the presence of police Officers and yet the courts have failed to try him for murder timeously. The account was so detailed; he recounted how their mother's relationship with Sabawu was one of violence evidenced by the number of reported cases of GBV until the couple's divorce and then later her massacre.



### **The family that was orphaned when their mother was shot due to GBV**

It was such an attention grabbing testimony which gave a meticulous account of the family's atrocity. It was one that would surely see one's tears trickling down as he showed the family that his mother left behind, how their life drastically changed after the death of their mother. There was no-one to pay their fees, he had to drop out of University and his little brothers had dropped out of school until Justice for Children Trust came to their aid and is now paying for their fees. His account exposed how the Police had failed them by falling into corruption to bend the legal process.

It is during these testimonies that gaps in the criminal justice system were exposed among them the unwarranted delays in trial and the granting of bail to murderers. These unwarranted delays in the trials proceedings as well as the granting of bail in such cases always compromise the course of justice as the perpetrator interfered with witnesses a great deal whilst he was out on bail. These are surely issues that have to be addressed if at all women can be protected by the laws of Zimbabwe.

What became apparent is the fact that law enforcement officials are so keen to maximize profits from the misfortunes of others. This is what has resulted in most people preferring to deal with "whom they know" to either bend or expedite the legal or judicial process, inviting corrupt elements to take advantage of a population that is largely illiterate in legal matters. Following the mind bogging and emotional testimonies a candle lighting ceremony was initiated as a way of transforming the pain of grief into the elixir of hope and telling the bereaved families that they are not alone Musasa will walk with them through and through in their quest for justice.



**The candle lighting ceremony that was initiated in commemoration of all women who died as a result of GBV**

Following the candle lighting ceremony the SIDA Country Director, Mr. Goran Engstrand extended his gratitude to the Director of Musasa Project and her staff for planning the gathering and also for the tireless efforts that the organization has made in mitigating the effects of Gender Based Violence. He reiterated the worrying increase in cases of Gender Based Violence and also noted with concern that the print media is reporting cases of gender based violence on a daily basis. He indicated that SIDA had engaged in a research so as to find out the cost of GBV and he was to officially launch a booklet that presented the results.

In launching the booklet by SIDA, **The Cost of Gender Based Violence in Zimbabwe: Issues and Policy Options** Mr. Engstrand underscored the fact that GBV is an enemy to poverty reduction, sustainable development, economic development and humanity of any country. He stressed the need to focus on issues to do with GBV in the constitution making process. Mr. Engstrand further underlined the cost of Gender Based Violence and indicated that this imposes a burden not only on individuals but on the nation as a whole. He revealed that the study conducted by SIDA reveal that the costs range from medical, justice ,transport, school fees, STI and HIV infection, trauma, loss of childhood, loss of household income, counseling and the loss of many productive years. These costs if converted into monetary terms would amount to millions of dollars that could be channeled towards production. He noted that SIDA is pulling in resources to address the challenges posed by GBV but its effort alone is not adequate, government support is needed.

The Deputy Prime Minister Honourable Thokozani Khupe represented by her Director officiated the gathering. In her speech the Deputy Prime Minister showed deep concern over the increasing number of women who are being killed as a consequence of GBV. She made reference to statistics that are reflecting an increase rather than a decrease in cases of GBV. She expressed hatred over these pernicious killings and underscored the fact that this infliction of pain on women is grossly inhumane and should be unacceptable in Zimbabwe.

The Honourable Minister alluded to the fact that these killings were usually a result of poverty as she set out poverty as the root cause of many misunderstandings. This she said is an issue that the Government should address in order to successfully curb GBV. She took the platform to share with the audience her embankment on programmes that will economically empower women and give women that financial freedom so that they do not find themselves clinging onto violent relationships for the sake of economical survival. In her speech she acknowledged that without economic emancipation, a women's dignity is compromised.

In concluding her speech the Deputy Prime Minister acknowledged the noble work that is being done by Musasa Project in championing the rights of women. She encouraged women to claim their space as women are the creators of their realities and also responsible for their realities.

Honorable Beatrice Nyamupinga who is the chairperson of the women's caucus addressed all the women present on the importance of participating in the constitution making process. She took this opportunity to reveal the importance of engaging in this process as she highlighted that this is not something that happens frequently giving an example of the present constitution which was enacted in 1979. Women were encouraged to take part in this process and raise their concerns and issues so that they are engraved in the new constitution. The Honorable Minister urged women to support each other during this process irregardless of their political affiliations.

With respect to gender based violence the Minister noted with horror the increasing number of women being murdered and she said something has to be done to protect women as women are also important citizens whose protection is vital and integral. The Minister also emphasized the great need to end GBV so that Zimbabwe is a safe place for women and children.

The gathering was a success thanks to all the women who attended the gathering as well as the invited guests who managed to make a date with Musasa in their protest against GBV. From all the people that delivered speeches what became apparent was the fact that cases of GBV were just getting out of hand. This pointed towards the need for an imminent response as women continue dying at the hands of their abusive husbands. The reported cases are just a tip of the iceberg as there are many cases that go unreported. The gathering was also a wake up call to all the women in abusive relationships as it unearthed what abusers can potentially do. Women should stand up and openly condemn GBV and thereby claim their rightful space in society. The responsible authorities should stop giving a blind eye to issues of GBV as they cost the country so much more than what is apparent to an individual.



**Women wave their placards in protest against GBV.**

Following the gathering petitions were delivered to different strategic offices to provide an analysis of the State's lack of will and its blatant indifference, negligence, unjustifiable delays and inability to prevent, investigate and sanction the murders. The respective offices included the Prime Minister, Minister of Justice, Co-Ministers of Home Affairs, Minister of women's Affairs, Gender and Community Development, The Attorney General, The Judge President and The Chief Magistrate. As of now the Director and the Advocacy Officer attended a meeting with the Attorney General on the 25<sup>th</sup> of June. The meeting sought to come up with solutions to address the gaps that had been highlighted in the petition within the prosecution so as to benefit survivors of GBV.

The sanctity of life should be upheld and in this respect even that of a woman as she is an equal entity in a marriage and should thus not be regarded as a second class citizen. Women are befitting of all protection and respect as their male counterparts. A holistic approach which seeks the commitment from all responsible authorities is what will make Zimbabwe a safe haven for women and children.