

WOMEN --- CAMPAIGN FOR SRHR

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The issue of sexual and reproductive health rights is broad and complex and cannot be dealt with in one go or pitched at the same level. The attempts to grasp and come up with ways to deal with issues can only be said to be commendable and necessary but the enormity of the problems that are contained within is staggering. The number of women killed by their partners was 6 times higher than the global average - a woman is killed every six hours in South Africa. That means almost 124 women are killed for whatever reason in south Africa every month and 1488 how do we even begin to make sense of that figure! It is gratifying to know that a high office such as the NPA saw it necessary to have an Indaba on Sexual health rights and voiced it's stance albeit some seemingly based on personal opinion rather than policy What worries me is that we do not look at this in a holistic sense and we seem to keep dissociating issues pertaining to sexuality altogether and HIV seems to be something flagged as a completely separate entity, like Oh, by the way HIV/AIDS is simply a problem of not abstaining, being faithful to one partner and condomising. I was disturbed by the findings of the research study conducted by The University of Stellenbosch's unit for religious and developmental studies among young Anglicans between the ages of 10 and 24, in cape town ; that more than 10% of young people between the ages of 10 and 13 are sexually active! 10 year olds? I have to now question how far have the education campaigns on HIV/AIDS and sexuality reached? Are young people trully being addressed or is this becoming some sort of pop-culture thing with bug-eyed cartoon characters ?Scrutinising? --- who's been the targets of these campaigns and are we really hearing the message? Furthermore, about 38% of respondents in this age group said that the pill can prevent HIV/Aids! The Pill, wow!!! and 30.4% believe that HIV can be transmitted via a toilet seat (and this is how many years later after the ?my friend with HIV is still my friend ads)! And About 27% think that HIV infection can be prevented by bathing after sex!! On sexual assault alone, we seem to be experiencing a surge , with South Africa having the worst statistics of rape in the world for a country not at war. Only 1 woman in 9 will report an attack to the police and of these only a small percentage result in conviction. The reasons for this will range from: The victim having to face embarrassment at police stations by having to tell her very personal story within earshot of other people, having to relive the ordeal in the retelling to an apathetic police personnel, the strange prejudices and stereotypes that exist such as the ?asking for it? by virtue of wearing short skirts or being on the road or wherever at certain times of the night to the idea that it's not as traumatic if you are not a virgin or are married or out on a date. The justice system has not served women well in this regard and the lack of convictions or the light sentences and fuel the shame and stigma attached to sexual violence. Clearly, the judicial system needs to change and this has been shouted from all manners of podiums by women's rights groups and other advocacy groups such as the TAC for years that : the Justice system should not operate in such a way that women who turn to it become victimised, personnel are adequately trained to work with victims in a restorative manner with counselling and information on available legal procedures and recourse that victims should/ can follow there is adequate facilities and staff that encourage victims to feel safe and protected when the justice system is seen to be taking this type of crime as serious by imposing harsher sentences a victim centred justice system is promoted, where we see delays in the prosecution of such crimes being shortened or preferably done away with completely and harsher sentences being employed. The NPA has called for harsher sentences for rapists ? to send a proper and meaningful message? ? said Advocate Mpshe at this week's sexual offences Indaba In Ekurhuleni. Magistrates and judges are reportedly reluctant to impose harsh sentences like life sentences. The feeling is that the length of the sentence should not be prioritised rather the system should work at convicting perpetrators, be it 1 year, 7 years or whatever - the message being that they would know that there is no escaping the law. Decriminalisation of Prostitution/ Sex workers When did the NPA become the arbiters of morality? I asked myself

this yesterday as I listened to Advocate Mokotedi's Mpshe's take on the decriminalisation of prostitution and really did some people just wake up to the realisation that maybe this is something that needs to be considered only because we have the World cup's coming and the likelihood of an influx of randy men or just men looking to get their jollies or even people seeing an economic boom in the sex trade? Now for us to debate issues of morality or whatever else we hold as 'values' is moot. Isn't it more important to empower people to have control over their lives in their chosen profession and not to pass judgement over issues and circumstances that they largely don't understand. Who looks after their rights as human beings because despite what anyone might end up thinking (or feeling, they are someone's children, someone parent, someone's lover --- human beings who mean, meant would mean something to someone) even seeing that already this is viewed as a dirty, immoral way of making a living and more especially when you consider how we have faired so far on enforcing or upholding sexual rights in South Africa and how we use morality. HIV and Aids is still being preached as a dirty state of being, a punishment for sin, maybe we have come a long way and there is still more to be done seeing that some pastors call you out to pray for you that this 'demon' might be erased, that GOD might have mercy on you and heal you. Some people have stopped going to churches because they feel as outcasts and wish that people would stop doing that, it fuels stigma and it fuels despondency in PLWHAs. I'm digressing. How much does the 'good' in decriminalisation of Prostitution outweigh the bad if all the bad seemingly hangs on an individual definition moral decency? The NPA, how is it fairing in prosecuting Rape and sexual violence cases and how are women and men in the sexual trade treated when they get violated, sexually and physically? I am disturbed and curious and worried about all the other problems that creep into this scenario unchecked because people become criminals for just trying to eke out a living, feed families and do whatever they need to survive.

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