



KEYNOTE ADDRESS

BY VERONICA DE KLERK - WAD EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

**DURING THE 5TH CONGRESS OF THE WOMEN'S DESK
OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE UNION OF NAMIBIA**

ON THE SUBJECT:

"What is Gender Based Violence - Combating Gender Based Violence in Society"

Conference theme:

***"PSUN WOMEN FOR A COMPREHENSIVE NATIONAL POLICY ON
GENDER BASED VIOLENCE"***

Venue: Andreas Kukuri Centre

Saturday, 20 July 2013 at 09:00

- Director of Ceremonies -
- Mr Kharuchab - 1st Vice President of the Public Service Union of Namibia;
- Ms Bertha Tjiundje - Chairperson of the “Women’s Desk” of the PSUN;
- Representatives from -
 - **the National Executive Council;
 - **the Women’s Desk Committee;
 - **the Trade Union Congress of Namibia; and
 - **Old Mutual Namibia;
- Distinguished invited guests;
- Members of the Media; and Ladies & Gentlemen:

Good morning:

It is a special honour for me to be part of this significant 5th Congress of the Women’s Desk of the Public Service Union of Namibia, which bears the theme: **“PSUN Women, for a Comprehensive National Policy on Gender Based Violence.”** I have been given a lengthy 45 minutes to address you on this theme, I therefore, beg for your indulgence, as I shall dwell on this topic a little longer.

I wish to extend my appreciation for the kind invitation extended to me to address you today and to congratulate the **“Women’s Desk”** on its special interest to develop a National Policy on Gender Based Violence for its institution.

It is further my pleasure to convey warmest greetings to the Members of the PSUN, from thousands of members of my organisation, **“Women’s Action for Development (WAD)**, which has been empowering primarily **rural** women and men in the socio-economic and social upliftment fields of development, for the past 19 years, with the explicit goal to complement the work of Government in its tireless efforts to reduce poverty and unemployment; to address evils such as Gender Based Violence, Rape, Murder, Passion Killing, etc; and to uphold Government’s lofty principles of good governance and the Rule of Law in the country.

WAD has a membership of over 50 000 women and men. It has a presence in all 13 regions of the country, which are represented by 107 Fieldworkers, known as **“Community Voice”** members.

Additional to the 13 country-wide "*Community Voice*" bodies, WAD has a Training Centre, based at Omahenene in the Omusati region; as well as the Hardap Training Centre in the south; and the Karas Training Centre, in the deep south, where training is offered in various subjects in the socio-economic and socio-political fields of development. As we speak, the WAD trainers are conducting training to 300 unemployed young people in all 6 constituencies of the Karas region alone, in various subjects, who will graduate at the end of the year.

Thank you, most sincerely, for reaching out to WAD, with the view to put our heads together today, to put measures in place for protecting women from complete physical destruction, but even more importantly, from losing the female spirit which sets us apart and which has to add value to humanity from our specific perspective.

Whereas I am very thankful that this conference is taking place at this crucial time where women are subjected to all forms of violence, I have to state that it is long overdue because the problem of Gender Based Violence has already spread to all levels of society like a menace which can only be eradicated with very decisive action which should be supported by the entire nation.

And when I say the entire nation, I mean right from our President to the humblest citizen walking the Namibian soil. I believe that if something is worth doing, it is worth doing well.

Although our Constitution proclaims everybody to be equal, women have, for far too long, been subjected to a position of a second class citizen and in very many cases, to being an object which can be beaten, kicked around, killed but also have to be available for sex, cooking food and rearing children.

Despite these atrocious deeds by men, Namibia still has an ideal opportunity to be the first country in Africa to put such stringent measures in place, for which we should put up a very hard fight to have it enforced consistently, that Gender Based Violence is regarded as one of the most serious contraventions against a fellow human being in the Namibian society,

The overpowering physical strength of men, compared to that of women, is equal to the disparity of a hunter, equipped with a high powered rifle with a telescope hunting a timid little deer, grazing peacefully in the veld.

Beating up a woman is just as unequal a situation as the hunter taking aim at **that** unarmed and helpless little buck. Needless to say, if God had in mind that women and men had to slug out their differences in physical fights, He would have created women more powerful, to match the physical strength of men.

According to recent statistics reported in the media:

More than 1 100 cases of rape and attempted rape are reported to the police every year, but very few perpetrators are actually brought to book due to ill-equipped and underfunded police operations.

Furthermore, many rape survivors also withdraw charges due to family and community pressure, which is a shame;

According to the Windhoek City Police Chief, Abraham Kanime, rape has increased by 10% from last year, while murders have escalated by a staggering 43%!

In 2010 statistics showed that 11 770 cases of gender-based violence were reported countrywide, of which 85% were serious assault cases.

He further stressed that there is no parental control.

If one goes to Eveline Street at Katutura, one finds children wandering the streets at night. Parents are completely shifting their responsibility. It was also pointed out that the community is quite passive as far as ethics are concerned, while alcohol and drugs are easily accessible to children.

Media reports further state, that in recent cases, some of the criminals received sentences of 14, 16, 18 or 45 years in prison. Violent crimes have been committed, and the sentences have been strict. The problem is however, that too many cases go unreported, or the cases fail in court.

It is estimated that in only one in every five cases where rape is alleged, does a case result in, at least one person being convicted for rape or attempted rape.

In 2006, the Legal Assistance Centre reported that an estimated one-third of all rape cases are withdrawn. Considering that there are approximately 1 600 cases of rape and attempted rape per year, this means that 1 000 victims of rape are

not receiving justice each year. Some of the most common reasons cited for rape case withdrawals include family pressure, shame and bribery.

Ladies & Gentlemen - Having cited some most disturbing statistics, I now wish to focus on the present status of Gender Based Violence in the country as a whole, the abuse of alcohol and drugs and crime in general, which have, for a long time, been plaguing the Namibian society!

Hardly a day goes by without women having been abused, raped or murdered by their partners, or without a baby having been dumped by its mother like refuse.

I still vividly recall how one of our members, the late Petrina Goagoses from the Hardap region, landed in hospital with 95% burns all over her body when her boyfriend locked her in her bedroom at Dordabis and set her bedroom on fire, after she ended their relationship.

The result was that she died shortly afterwards in the ICU of the Katutura State hospital. He was thankfully apprehended and charged with murder!

To say the least, Ladies & Gentlemen, Namibia has become nothing less than an embarrassment and a shocking disgrace because of the poor image which the country is gaining internationally. In the process, H/E, President Pohamba, has repeatedly called upon the entire citizenry, including the Police, NGO's, Churches, Youth Movements, etc to do everything possible to assist in stopping this madness of men being unable to accept rejection by women and to see killing them as the only solution to sooth their hurt egos.

However, in the case of Passion Killing, there is a clear line between boys who might have experienced serious rejection before, or not having learned right from the parental home and through their school career, to accept defeat like a real man.

It is most disturbing, that instead of men developing refined skills of maintaining a relationship with women, based on love and respect, men are rather developing an ownership perception of women, which is fueled by the presentation of gifts to "buy" their love.

Young women on the other hand, who might have grown up marginalized, unfortunately often contribute towards such a relationship which is based purely on the desire for more and more material things, even beyond the point where they have fallen out of love with their boyfriends.

...And to prove this - I wish to refer to a suicide note last year, in which a young man testified that he was continuously investing in a young woman, by regularly giving her material support and gifts to win her love. **This was clearly pointed out, as the trigger for Passion Killing, when he summarily killed her, as well as himself, after she continuously accepted many expensive gifts and money from him, totaling as much as N\$50 000,00, but thereafter rejected him! Sadly, she paid dearly with her life!**

The question is: "Why are our Parents so silent about these evils being committed by their children"? We as parents, should start asking ourselves: "Where did we go wrong in the upbringing of our children, and why is it, that our children have no respect for the lives of others?"

If this were not true, why then, are our boys summarily killing - and why is it that our daughters are throwing their babies away like refuse and becoming murderers?

It is no secret that the Parental Home unfortunately often presents to children the first exposure of disrespect and violence against women, when fathers beat up mothers in front of their children. In this way, boys in particular, are developing more and more, grossly distorted perceptions of male/female relationships from such incidents.

Thus, when the Parental Home fails in this way, it fails the entire community - and when it fails the entire community, it fails the entire generation!

...And what is more - many young men sadly do not know how to deal with their emotions, because they were ever so often told by their parents that boys must act like real men who do not cry, because crying is a sign of weakness!

No wonder that many boys grow up to become men who cannot deal with disappointments because they have never really learned how to deal with their emotions.

Thus, when explosive emotions pile up, such as rejection by their partners, many men are totally unprepared on how to deal with their emotions, and it eventually sadly erupts in Passion Killing within relationships with girls.

This is therefore, the biggest mistake parents can make, because how then, will boys ever learn to deal with their emotions if they are not aloud to cry?

Since children are not born with knowledge of the dress code of social behavior, failure of the Parental Home and the school - which is the extension of the family home - to train and strengthen the norms and values; the rights and wrongs before children enter into adult life, they enter life totally unequipped with crucial life skills and **they** eventually become the Passion Killers, Thieves, Alcoholics.....yes, the Drug Addicts of our society.

The influence of alcohol and drugs on social behavior, is a well-documented topic in male/female relationships, and a proven cause of GBV which can spill over into Passion Killing.

According to media reports of last year, it is most disconcerting that Windhoek alone, currently has a most disturbing 5 000 shebeens, mostly in poor areas, of which 1 500 are unlicensed.

It now seems that Shebeens have become the NUMBER ONE income-generator for especially poor communities. With so many shebeens mushrooming in the country, we have to admit to ourselves that this evil has become a social disgrace and an embarrassment in our country, because it touches the very core - the very fibre of our human dignity and the main cause of Gender Based Violence, Poverty and a destroyer of families.

In fact, Alcoholism is one of the most overlooked and under-rated evils in the Namibian society today. It is ironic that we are continuously expressing outrage about the numerous incidents of violence against women, but we are not addressing the evils of Alcoholism; At the same time, we are highly concerned about the raping and passion killing of women, but we are not addressing the evils of Alcoholism which is a main cause of these evils.

If we as a nation, is really serious about reducing these atrocities, in which women are losing their lives at an alarming rate, we should address one of the main causes of it all, namely the availability of alcohol in uncontrolled quantities to everybody and anybody with money, including the youth!

A few years back, WAD conducted a 2-year research together with the Social Sciences Faculty of the University of Namibia, to determine the root causes of violence against women and girls and to understand what goes on in the criminal mind when these acts of violence are committed. This research was conducted among numerous inmates in prisons country-wide where the most violent offenders were kept.

To say the least, the results were alarming! The findings identified, among others -

- **Alcoholism**, as being the main cause for GBV; followed by
- **Harmful cultural practices such as Labola**, which gives rise to the notion that men own women through this practice and therefore are at liberty to discipline them if they are “disobedient”;
- It further identified that **Low educational levels** contribute towards Gender Based Violence; as well as
- **Unemployment and Poverty** among the perpetrators;
- The study further indicated that most offenders of gender based violence first experienced Gender Based Violence, when their fathers beat up their mothers in their parental home; and secondly, when the perpetrators of such violence, were under the influence of alcohol or drugs.

In this regard, the PSUN should encourage the continuous revitalized action by the Police against illegal shebeens, which should be enforced by the co-operation and support of the entire citizenry.

Ladies & Gentlemen: There is no doubt that Namibia is in a serious crisis and has now come to the cross-roads of this serious problem. The question is now, where and how do we start to correct this massive problem in our society?

In WAD’s view - For the new generation of young people to set up well-informed and formative Parental Homes, they should already, **at school level**, intensively be exposed and prepared for the art of gender relations and parenthood.

The answer is undoubtedly to focus on that GOLDEN SUBJECT called “Life Skills” at school: It is for this reason that the Women’s Desk of the PSUN should appeal to the Ministry of Education to ensure that the subject, **“Life Skills”**, which was grossly neglected in schools in the past, should now be presented only by fully-qualified Life-skills teachers. The PSUN should further appeal to the Ministry that ***“Lifeskills”*** should become, as a matter of great urgency, a subject on which learners should start writing examinations and which should be passed by all learners, to enable them to advance to the next school grade, instead of learners playing rugby, and teachers marking their examination papers during ***“Life Skills”*** periods.

WAD believes that the implementation of that **GOLDEN SUBJECT, “Life Skills”**, as an important **examinable** subject, is fully justified. It is the most important subject to prepare learners on how to deal with life - to train learners on how to respect themselves; how to respect human life; how to respect women; how to respect our norms and values; how to refrain from misusing alcohol and drugs; how to deal with family life; yes, how to deal with their respective careers.....

WAD views the gross neglect of children in their parental homes, together with the gross neglect of the subject, “Life Skills” within schools for so long, as a primary reason for the social horrors which the Namibian society is experiencing right now with increased frequency.

It is for this reason that WAD has, since 2011 penetrated all Secondary Schools country-wide to equip “Life Skills” Teachers and School Counsellors with knowledge based on the findings of the mentioned research study and which is being carried over to 67 500 learners at all secondary schools, country-wide.

Women and Child Protection Units are crucial to support women who are in a serious crisis! However, WAD has received numerous complaints by women, that our “Women and Child Protection Units” are not functioning as they should, and that the telephones of those units very often go unanswered. It should be remembered that when women make calls to those centres, they are desperate, and that they might be in a life-threatening crisis. Thus, if those telephones are not answered, these Units become dysfunctional, leaving desperate women in complete despair and without assistance when they needed it the most.

The Women’s Desk of the PSUN would do well if it appealed to the Inspector-General of the Police to lodge an urgent investigation into the efficient functioning of the “Women and Child Protection Units” across the country, to ensure that women receive the necessary assistance when they need it the most.

Country-wide “Stand Up against Crime Campaigns” are equally crucial! WAD has taken note with great appreciation, of the “Stand Up Against Crime” campaigns which are being established by the Police in a proactive bid to curb Passion Killing and crime in general. WAD has pledged its unconditional support to this commendable initiative by the Police, to assist in curbing crime.

It is therefore, incumbent upon every single citizen of the nation, including the PSUN, to join the Police in such campaigns to ensure a crime-free society.

Churches should do much more, because Churches should be a refuge for the community and should assume a much more **meaningful role of outreach** and become more experienced as a formative force in communities. Gone are the days when Spiritual Leaders merely preached about spirituality from their pulpits on church days, because it is crucial that spiritual leaders should, more than ever before, become involved as important facilitators for church groups, where men and women can talk freely about their trials and tribulations in difficult relationships.

The Women’s Desk of the PSUN, should become involved in the process of appealing to the Council of Churches to ensure that when Training Manuals are compiled for Spiritual Leaders, it should incorporate the training of Pastors on how to address social problems such as Alcoholism and Drug abuse, GBV, Passion Killing, Baby Dumping, etc, and to be more proactive counselors in social issues!

The Print and Electronic Media are equally indispensable in any society and as such, has a very important **informative** and **educative** role to play in this game.

The Women’s Desk should therefore, encourage the media to engage in “Investigative Journalism”, instead of merely engaging in “Sensational Reporting”. The Media is a powerful force to influence public opinion and should therefore, investigate causal factors behind these social evils, and continuously expose them to its readers and viewers.

Since women have had enough of **this** ongoing slaughter among their ranks, this congress has the task to deliberate on a comprehensive national policy on Gender Based Violence, which should guide action against perpetrators.

In view of what I have just shared, I wish to leave some additional thoughts with you, to further contemplate on your National Policy on Gender Based Violence:

1. Gender Based Violence should be re-classified as a much more serious crime which justifies prolonged prison terms, without the option of a fine – in other words, **mandatory prison time**.
2. Offenders should receive hard labour; mandatory corrective training in prisons, as well as community service among those women whom they have violated.
3. Furthermore, Gender Based Violence should be included in the school curricula and be dealt with as a major offence and public disgrace.
4. An issue which is most important for public servant parents is that talks on sexuality from parent to child, should no longer be taboo, but rather one on which parents, schools, churches, youth groups, the media etc, should debate and seek solutions to this mammoth challenge in our society.
5. Furthermore, perpetrators of Gender Based Violence, should not be considered for promotion, or any senior position in Government or education;
6. Gender Based Violence offenders should forfeit their membership in the Public Service Union of Namibia;
7. Your members are the direct servants of the public, and as such, not only meticulous execution of duties is expected of you, but also exemplary conduct which honours the name of your institution and Government;
8. It should be noted that alcohol and drug abuse have been proven to be the main drivers of crime against women and girls.

The PSUN can thus, only do well, if the it takes a very strong stance against the misuse of alcohol and drugs by its members. No tolerance should exist towards your members who are over-indulging in liquor, or who trade in liquor, because this could lead to Gender Based Violence, poor conduct in public, or a destroyer of family homes;

9. Members of the PSUN should realize that they are in essence the work horses of Government which are implementing the laws laid down by Government. Thus, a strict Code of Conduct and high moral values should be maintained by people in your positions at all times. Mutual respect for the colleague of the opposite gender should be a hall mark amongst your cadres;

Ladies and Gentlemen: The gravity of crime is determined by the perception of the community of such crime. Gender Based Violence should be viewed in society as a public disgrace, and children should, since infancy, be raised to despise violence against women.

Please remember dear friends, that whatever policy is put on paper should be lived out amongst people to come alive. The value of a policy lies in the extent to which it is accepted and personalized and by the degree to which it changes the daily conduct of the individual.

Namibia has no shortage of laws about Gender Based Violence on paper. The problem however lies in the failure to apply them or for structures set up to function as visualized such as the Women and Child Protection Units and the Police Force.

I believe in: "Prevention is better than cure" and therefore, the upbringing of our children in parental homes should be of such a sound nature, that girls and boys grow up with the realization that they are equal and that their difference in gender does not secure a position of preferential treatment for boys.

Respect for girls should be ingrained in the parental home, and as children grow up, it should be continuously strengthened through posters, radio and Television advertisements, etc. Moreover, catchy slogans should remind boys that "only cowards abuse, or beat girls".

The Public Service Union of Namibia, as a representative and respected body, should launch regular campaigns among its members and within schools, in conjunction with teachers' representative bodies and for greater effectiveness, church leaders should also be drawn in.

Special anti-Gender Based Violence themes should be decided upon and debated upon within schools, and the idea of nominating a boy and a girl as "Peace Ambassadors" for every school, should be strongly considered. Their duties should be to help maintain discipline and order among learners and when differences occur, to help settle those differences amicably and peacefully.

In that way leadership is fostered, but also the culture of peaceful settlement of differences.

Ladies & Gentlemen - You would have realized by now that I have put great emphasis on our children - After all, **they** are the future generation. If we really want to break the cycle of violence in our communities, **we will have to start with the youth.** They are exposed to violence in the parental home and will continue that violence in their own homes one day, unless they are re-orientated and brought to new insight.

Although teachers have their own member organizations, there is no doubt that the PSUN should collaborate with teachers' organizations, especially about matters concerning the upbringing of our children, and in particular regarding a cross-cutting problem such as Gender Based Violence.

Since women are simply not as powerful as men who beat up women, women should regard such men as absolute cowards who prefer to bully the weaker sex. Apart from serious physical harm that can be inflicted in a woman's body, such altercations usually take place in the parental home in front of children.

Gender Based Violence usually follows the abuse of alcohol or other substance abuse, such as drugs. Children again witness the relationships between alcohol abuse and violence.

The derogatory language which is inevitably flung at women by their husbands, has an unfathomable influence on the minds of growing children.

The bewilderment and very often destruction of household property which may be very dear to children, can very negatively change children's perception of their parental home as a safe haven of love and comfort - a place of refuge in troubled times.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I have cited you aspects of typical GBV situations in parental homes. You may immediately think that Gender Based Violence does not only happen in parental homes. My answer is, without a shadow of doubt, that all incidents of Gender Based Violence are born and nurtured right in our parental homes where children are exposed to it for the first time.

If it doesn't happen in your home, it happens in someone else's home from where it spreads to boyfriends beating up girlfriends, boys killing their grandparents etc.

The evil of Gender Based Violence is one of the rotten spots in our communities which does not need much fuel in boys in particular, to become a regular way of venting frustrations.

The reason for the violence is not always because of what the wife or the girlfriend said or did. It is often pent up feelings about frustrations or failures at work or hurtful things which other people said. At some stage some bottled up frustrations must be aired and all too often women become the targets.

But Ladies & Gentlemen, there are always two sides to a story, and I trust that you will bear with me. If women are really honest with themselves, they will go inward in an honest manner and ask themselves: "how do we, as women bring violence upon ourselves?"

To this, I wish to state that, although no man has the right to beat up a woman, or to murder or rape her, it has become an urgent priority for WAD to lead another research study, on how women contribute towards violence, in terms of verbal abuse; psychological abuse or economic abuse, to enable society to have a

balanced view of why women are subjected to violence and how to address this evil successfully in society. The results could be an eye-opener!

To dramatically reduce Gender Based Violence in society, it is imperative for the Women's Desk to contribute towards sensitizing the youth, especially boys -

1. Because experience has shown that there are insufficient programmes in Namibia, aimed at young girls and boys, to address cultural practices that impede the development of women, and which are in direct conflict with the Namibian Constitution.
2. Because there are insufficient programmes that are aimed at teaching young boys about the values associated with being a man - and the values associated with being a woman - and how the two can relate to each other throughout their lives.
3. Hence, to bridge these gaps, the Women's Desk should aim to create a new generation of boys who are interested in the advancement of women, to honor them, respect them as honorable human beings and to further inspire boys to fight for the plight of women, well-knowing that the majority of crimes committed against women, are committed by men and who are labeled as the main culprits!
4. The Women's Desk should further aim to sensitize young boys at all levels, to become true Ambassadors for domestic peace and goodwill for the promotion of women's rights - and to effectively involve boys and girls in the mainstream of activities that are aimed at addressing the problem of Gender Based Violence.

In conclusion, Ladies & Gentlemen: As Community Developer, gravely concerned about the serious social challenges which the organisation is forced to deal with on a daily basis, it is WAD's conviction that if more emphasis is placed on "Life Skills" to prepare young learners how to deal with life, their careers, their marriages, their family lives....moral values, discipline, etc - and how to respect themselves - and women and girls in general - we would not have to bow our heads in shame regarding all the atrocities which are committed within our

society, every single day of our lives, including Passion Killing, Rape, Baby Dumping, Teenage Pregnancies, etc!

I trust that, as the Women's Desk develops its comprehensive National Policy on Gender Based Violence, it will herald a new beginning among your members because, we have seen enough bloodshed; enough tears; enough suffering; enough loss of lives of our mothers and daughters.....!

Let us, as Public Servants, never stand accused of failing in our duty to contribute towards a violence-free society! Let us instead join hands to transform Namibia into a safe and peaceful country, for the benefit of our entire nation, but also for potential tourists and investors, because this in turn, will contribute greatly towards the economic stability and well-being of our country.

I salute the leaders and members of the "Public Service Union of Namibia", for your dedication towards rooting out the evil of Gender Based Violence in our society. May God bless you, and may you never give up, and abandon your dreams.

Thank you!