

## **Opening Address**

by Veronica De Klerk: WAD Executive Director

during a

### **SADC Conference**

hosted by

*Women's Action for Development (WAD);  
University of Namibia (UNAM); and  
The Ministry of Safety and Security*

### **Tabling of the Research Project:**

**“Understanding Violent Crimes Against Women and Girls among Convicted  
Prisoners in Namibia: Implications for Prevention and Treatment”**

*Safari Hotel and Conference Centre  
22 – 23 November 2006*

- Director of Ceremonies:
- **The Hon. Peter Tsheehama:** Minister of Safety and Security  
[Representing His Excellency, the President of the Rep. of Nam.]
- **The Hon. Marlene Mungunda:** Minister of Gender Equality and  
Child Welfare;
- **Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corpse;**
- **Honourable Members of Parliament;**
- **Dr Hina Mu Asekele:**  
Director of Research at the University of Namibia;
- **Dean Nangula Kathindi:** WAD outgoing Chairperson and newly  
appointed “Provincial Executive Officer” of the Anglican Church of  
Southern Africa;
- **Dr Anton Bösl:** Res. Representative of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung;  
and sponsor of this conference
- **Ms Beryl Möhr:** Programme Executive of the Bristol-Myers Squibb  
Foundation and sponsor of the Research study:  
*“Violent Crimes Against Women and Girls among Convicted Prisoners in  
Namibia: Implications for Prevention and Treatment”*;
- **Mr Gayton McKenzie:** South African born Motivational Speaker and  
internationally renowned for his book: *“The Choice”*
- **Distinguished SADC Delegates** - from South Africa; Zimbabwe;  
Zambia; and Mozambique;
- Members of line Ministries; Spiritual and educational institutions; Non  
Governmental Organisations;
- Members of the Media; and Ladies and Gentlemen

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Please allow me, first of all, to welcome and thank our Keynote Speaker for today, the Hon. Peter Tsheehama, Minister of Safety and Security, for honouring us with his presence here today to officially table this ground-breaking research report which seeks to go right down to the **root causes** of violent behaviour of men against women and girls in the Namibian society.

In the same vein, I welcome the Honourable Marlene Mungunda, Minister of Gender Equality and Child Welfare, for her presence, and wish to acknowledge all the valuable work of her Ministry, which have been put into the combating of gender-based violence among women and children in the Namibian society.

At the same time, I wish to express my profound appreciation towards the Vice-Chancellor, Prof. Lazarus Hangula and the research team of the University of Namibia for the exemplary research work which was conducted over a period of 9 months, to determine the root causes of violence against women and girls in the Namibian society.

I similarly thank the Ministry of Safety and Security - and wish to acknowledge its outstanding support which has afforded WAD, as the Commissioning NGO of the project, as well as the University of Namibia - as the research institution – the opportunity to progress with the project - to the point, where the findings and recommendations can be tabled during this conference, for remedial action to be taken by the Namibian society.

Dr Anton Bösl, and the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, the main donor of WAD, should indeed be commended for their welcome sponsorship of N\$100 000,00 - to facilitate this conference, to the extent that we could fly in delegates from the SADC region to exchange views on the challenges of violence against women and girls.

Similarly, I welcome and express my sincere gratitude towards Ms Beryl Möhr and the Bristol-Myers Squibb Foundation, for their welcome sponsorship of N\$50 000,00 - to fund this milestone research project which will enlighten us all on how to tackle the evil of violence in our society.

Their sincere commitment towards the combating of violence against women and girls in the Namibian society and rural development as a whole, are highly appreciated.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I gratefully acknowledge the presence of Mr Gayton McKenzie in our midst today. Gayton became an outstanding and sort-after international motivational speaker, after he was sentenced to many years of imprisonment in South Africa for various crimes. When I asked Gayton what his fee was, I almost fainted when he informed me that it is **N\$25 000,00 per hour!** But when I informed him with a shaken voice that WAD's work entails the upliftment of the poorest of the poor, he said to me: "Veronica, you have me for free, on condition that the SADC countries purchase my book, *"The Choice"* for my message to be multiplied"! Ladies & Gentlemen, Please give this remarkable and unselfish man a Big Hand!

We are particularly honoured to welcome our SADC delegates at this conference who have joined us to share with us their experiences about the social phenomenon of violence against women and girls in their respective countries.

Although SADC countries are separated by territorial boundaries - and although we have our language and other cultural differences, there are several similarities and points of common interest.

One unfortunate similarity however, which we do share in our sub-region, is the occurrence of violence against women and girls within our respective countries.

It is with a degree of hesitance in front of visitors from neighbouring countries that I have to admit that we in Namibia, were left speechless during the past couple of years by the incidence of some of the most horrifying cases of rape and the brutal slaying of women and girls.

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| There were times that we, as women felt that being a woman, has become a high risk state of being - and that visiting places of enjoyment, is tantamount to playing Russian Roulette with death! |
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Whereas the independence of our country heralded freedom from the oppression of our former colonial masters, the long-awaited freedom cannot be enjoyed by women and girls in our communities because of unidentified killers, lurking in our midst and who can unexpectedly discard their guise of civilized human beings.

With recorded rising levels of crime in Namibia, the very nature of human beings as gregarious animals, seems to pose life-threatening dangers for one half of the population. Those who should be protecting the physically less robust members of society, seem to becoming their worst enemy.

Ladies and Gentlemen: It is against this background that Women's Action for Development realized that it was of paramount importance to know what the reasons were behind the violent behaviour of men against women and girls.

WAD therefore, commissioned a scientific research study to determine the root causes of this social phenomenon. The University of Namibia and the Ministry of Safety and Security were approached as lead institutions to direct the research.

The reason for the inclusion of the Ministry of Safety and Security is because convicted perpetrators of violent crimes against women and girls were identified as respondents for the research.

The well selected professional research team of UNAM, consisting of Researchers, Clinical Psychologists, Social Workers, etc were tasked to conduct personal interviews with convicted prisoners in the identified prisons in terms of a wide-ranging Questionnaire as research instrument, to comprehend social behaviour and domestic conditions which lead to atrocities committed against soft targets.

The research team further tried to understand what goes on in the criminal mind before and during deeds of violence against their victims.

After 9 months of ground-breaking personal interviews with the convicted prisoners, the UNAM research team has now completed its report which incorporates various findings and recommendations of great significance. The report has reached the stage where it is now ready to be tabled, thanks to the dedicated and committed research team and the Ministry of Safety and Security.

Without pre-empting the findings in the report, Namibia is now for the first time in a position to know for certain, what the root causes of violent crimes against women and girls are, within the Namibian context.

This should pave the way for educational institutions, churches, youth movements, the legislature etc, to embark upon measures of appropriate nature, to forcefully combat this rising evil in our midst.

I sincerely believe that the youth of Namibia constitute fertile soil for the inculcation of a new value system of respect for women and girls, in order to re-programme the mindset of future generations. Simultaneously, with **that** educative programme, a zero tolerance attitude for violence against women and girls, should be demonstrated by our Courts of Justice.

While the youth is being prepared for a respectful cohabitation of the genders, those misfits who continuously commit violent deeds, should be mercilessly removed from society for a long period of time - and when they have completed their term, they should be exposed to a rigorous psychological assessment to determine whether they are ready after their long incarceration, to rejoin the community for a harmonious life.

Convicted criminals who served their term in prison, should not merely be assumed to have rehabilitated in prison. Whatever their problem has been, which had them convicted for violence against women and girls, could have aggravated in prison. Releasing them without a proper assessment, would be very risky, since the same. or even worse crimes, could be repeated.

It is the sincere wish of Women's Action for Development, that very useful insights will be gained from the report, which in turn may lead to measures on the ground, to curb the social evil which is fast increasing in frequency, besides becoming more gruesome every time it recurs.

I wish to express the hope that all SADC countries will accept the findings and recommendations as contained in this report, as an academic gratuity – an endowment from Namibia, to enable their countries to draw comparisons from the Namibian experience which they can mould into preventative measures within their respective countries.

With this research study, it is proven how effectively civil society organizations can join hands with government institutions to catapult Namibia into a brighter future, by pooling resources and academic expertise.

Ladies and Gentlemen: For this research study to be worth the time and resources spent, it is imperative that the findings and recommendations contained therein, have to be turned into concrete actions for educational institutions, Ministries, churches, the parental home, and in particular for women and girls, to benefit.

Convicted criminals did not merely become criminals as adults. The parental home, schools and the society at large to a greater or lesser degree, stand accused of failing to inculcate sound value systems, supportive of a balanced perception of women and girls, or provided direct examples of

human behaviour which established socially objectionable actions as acceptable behaviour in the distorted value system of the future criminal.

Criminals are therefore, often the product of the failures of our social institutions, which should have properly shaped the individual for normative behaviour within society.

To redress the situation, all those social institutions, responsible for impacting formative influences on the child, on its way to adulthood, should carefully study the report and take serious cognizance of the implications for them, followed by practical corrective measures in their roles of shaping the destiny of a child.

Namibia can only gain the respect of the world - small as it may be - by proving in many ways how the nation is striving to solve their social problems for themselves, and how we are continuously searching for ways to neutralize crime which greatly repels foreign investment.

The findings in this report should be a wake-up call for the entire society and its structures, to recognize and acknowledge their roles in the formation of its members, to become exemplary individuals, who would contribute to the growth of the country, instead of corroding it from the inside.

It is our sincere wish that our respective countries will be up to the task of curing itself from this own ailment which has aggressively grown like a cancer, in our respective societies.

After all, we owe it to ourselves and to our future generation!

**Thank you!**