



PRESS STATEMENT

CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS DEMANDS THAT GOVERNMENT PUT WORDS INTO ACTION AND TAKE A DEFINITIVE STAND ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

7 August 2017

The Centre for Human Rights, Faculty of Law, University of Pretoria, takes note of media reports and images circulating on social media, suggesting that the Deputy Minister of Higher Education, Mduzuzi Manana, has been involved in a case of assaulting a woman in a public place (restaurant) over the weekend.

The Centre for Human Rights finds these reports particularly worrying. Firstly, they come in the wake of recent incidences of violence against women, which have sparked a national outcry and raised concerns about the safety, dignity and value of women and girls in South Africa. Secondly, on the eve of celebrating Women's Day on 9 August, these reports reaffirm the fact that violence against women is an issue of pandemic proportions that cuts across women of every social strata. The government can no longer pay lip service to the issue of violence against women in South Africa if they claim that they have the best interest of the women of South Africa at heart.

This matter is of even greater concern seeing that it involves a high-ranking member of government, and it provides an opportunity for the government to take action. A high-profile incident like this presents the best opportunity to address the issue of violence against women. South Africa has one of the highest rates of violence against women in the world and most of these violent actions are a result of, and sustained through, the devaluing of women and the normalisation of such acts. No matter the context,

it is clear that the reported conduct is utterly unacceptable. Incidents like these happen on the streets, in the home, in bars and in restaurants of our country on a daily basis. This incident is an opportunity to make an example by taking concrete and swift action.

During August, South Africans are celebrating Women's Month, but incidences of violence against women remain prevalent while the government's efforts are often criticised for being merely rhetorical. This incident presents an opportunity for the South African government to convert words into action. The Centre for Human Rights therefore makes the following calls to the relevant authorities:

- All perpetrators of violence against women, no matter how prominent they are, should be condemned and held accountable for their actions.
- There should be high-level political statements decrying this conduct. The Deputy Minister should be treated like any other South African, both in having his rights assured, and in being investigated.
- Finally, it is important that most diligent investigation must be conducted and the Deputy Minister must be prosecuted if there is sufficient evidence. A lack of decisive action will make all other government efforts ring hollow.

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