



PRESS STATEMENT

18 May 2015

UNITED NATIONS RAPPORTEUR VISIT TO SOUTH AFRICA CANCELLED

Violence against women is endemic in South Africa: a woman is killed by an intimate partner every eight hours, South Africa is regularly listed as having the highest rate of rape in the world and survivors of sexual violence receive inadequate and inconsistent treatment.

The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Rashida Manjoo, has been trying to lead a fact finding mission aimed at investigating the high levels of violence against women in South Africa since 2012. However, on 11 May 2015, she said that because of repeated delays and ignored requests by government, she has had to cancel the visit. Her term as Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women ends in July.

This is troubling and suggests disregard by our government of two important things: (i) the gravity of violence against women in South Africa and (ii) the mechanisms and processes of international law that are designed to protect and promote human rights.

Special Rapporteurs are experts who are appointed by the United Nations Human Rights Council to look into human rights violations. Some are given a country mandate but increasingly the trend has been to appoint Special Rapporteurs to focus on a particular thematic area, as in the case of the mandate on violence against women. Conducting fact findings missions is one of the key functions of Special Rapporteurs and involves rigorous investigation of facts, determinations of responsibility suggesting recommendations for reform.

Our government's response to Manjoo's mission suggests ambivalence about the gravity of violence against women in South Africa. While there has been some acknowledgement that levels



of violence against women are worryingly high, this has not translated into effective action and despite persistent and determined pressure by civil society groups for government to adopt a strategic plan for combatting gender based violence, this has still not been prioritised.

Fact finding lies at the core of a great deal of human rights advocacy. It can have a major impact on judges, government officials, scholars and human rights groups. It is a crucially important platform to discuss solutions to human rights issues and it is unfortunate that Manjoo's mission will no longer go ahead.

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