

## **FEMICIDE IS A CRIME AGAINST HUMANITY**

The Southern African Catholic Bishops' Conference (SACBC) Justice and Peace Commission is outraged by the high levels of intentional killings of women and girls reported nationwide.

Over the past few weeks, the country has witnessed unapparelled incidences of mindless and callous killings of innocent women and girls. The latest of such tragic killings being that of a University of Cape Town student, Uyinene Mrwetyana and boxing champion, Leighandre Jegels who was shot and killed by her police officer boyfriend.

The Justice and Peace Commission does not only condemn the killings, but also anger in our hearts and physical abuse, emotional abuse, economic abuse and sexual abuse of women and children. We echo the words of Pope Francis who recently said that, "Violence against women cannot be treated as 'normal,' maintaining a culture of machismo blind to the leading role that women play in our communities. It is not right for us to look the other way and let the dignity of so many women, especially young women, be trampled upon." (Pope Francis, Peru, 19 June 2018)

South Africa has got an appalling record of femicide rate, with the World Health Organization estimating that 12.1 in every 100 000 women are victims to femicide yearly. The obtaining human security situation in South Africa, is in stark contrast to the country's revered democratic ethos. Violation of women's basic human rights, as manifested in the current wave of wanton and senseless killings of women and young girls testify that South Africa is struggling to transient its violent past epitomized by the apartheid system.

Despite our impressive constitution that embraces plurality and equality between men and women, gender and power relations are still skewed in favour of man. The prevalence of patriarchal practices in all spheres of human interaction and media discourse shows that women are still not being treated as equals. Male chauvinism, misogynistic tendencies and stereotypes about women are a social pathology that still haunts our country. The collective upshot of these toxic day-to-day practices amplified through public institutions and media discourse offer justification for female subordination and oppression by men.

The recurrence of femicide and other forms of gender-based violence in our country speaks to the urgent need for collective action by all concerned parties in order to root out this deplorable culture. The government must take serious and practical steps to stem the tide of femicide. It is therefore imperative that the political leadership puts the security of women and young girls high on the national agenda.

It is time, in the words of Deuteronomy (30:19), to "Choose life so that you and your descendants may live ..." We invite the country to join Pope St John Paul II who once said: "I proclaim, with all the conviction of my faith in Christ and with an awareness of my mission, that violence is evil, that violence is unacceptable as a solution to problems, that violence is unworthy... Violence is a lie, for it goes against the truth of our faith, the truth of our humanity" (Pope John Paul II, Dublin, 27 September 1979).

There is need for multisectoral engagement to raise public awareness about women's rights. Existing laws on women's rights must be enforced without fear or favour to ensure that perpetrators are brought to book. As the Southern African Catholic Bishops Commission Justice and Peace Commission, it is our considered position that femicide is crime against humanity and must be exterminated by all means necessary.

We commit our churches and schools as safe places for women and children. We as church will use our liturgies, catechesis and homilies to sensitize men and boys about the evils of gender based violence.

For further information, contact:

Bishop Victor Phalana  
Chairperson, SACBC Justice and Peace Commission  
0824707151.