

**SEMINAR ON SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN THE
WORK PLACE**

THEME: DO NOT IGNORE THE SIGNS!!!

DATE: 30 AUGUST 2021

Programme Director

The Minister

Director-General

All the Deputy Director-Generals present

General Secretary of the ELRC

Chief Executive Officer of SACE

Our Key Note Speaker

All the speakers

Esteemed Guests

Colleagues

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good morning.

I am honoured to have been given the opportunity to say a few words in this event. I would also like to take the opportunity to thank the coordinators of this seminar which is the first one to happen in the Department of Basic Education and I hope that this won't be the last. I am humbled and excited to see this happening in the Department because basic education is the first step that leads everyone to the desired future. It is a solid foundation for future.

I am delighted to see that we are being joined by the Department of Justice and Constitutional Development and the Department of Women, Youth and People with Disabilities, together with the Commission for Gender Equality. These are the key

Departments in addressing the injustices perpetrated upon women in our country and also ensuring the importance of the rule of law on gender equality. We acknowledge your contribution to initiatives that promote gender equality in South Africa.

Of course when we talk about gender equality, we are not just talking about the interests of women. We talk about the kinds of changes that women of 1956 have fought for. We salute these women because they brought improvements not only for women, but for the whole country. They have changed the mindset of a cultural belief that a man is seen as powerful and can control a woman. Again women rely on a man to provide for her basic needs. Throughout history, women had a very different role in the workforce than they do now. No longer are the days when men are the workers and women are the homemakers. Today we are proud to announce that women are slowly but surely striving for workplace equality. Thank you for the women of 1956.

I would like to thank men like Mr Patrick Shai, the Managing Director of Khuluma Ndoda Organisation. These are men who raised their voices and support women to fight for equality. Organization like Khuluma Ndoda are mobilizing men to take steps towards gender equality and we are proud of their work. Keep encouraging other men to standup and fight gender-based violence against women and children.

I would also like to thank all of you who compromised your valuable time to be part of this event. Your presence is much appreciated.

Programme Director, let me start by saying a day like this give us an opportunity to reflect on our work and commitment as the Department and its stakeholders on the initiatives that promote quality education in South Africa. Quality education starts with job satisfaction of employees.

Today we have met here to touch on an issue of serious concern not only to our country but to the whole world, which is Gender-Based Violence (GBV). In South Africa more women have been murdered as a result of GBV and many continue to suffer abuse in

their homes and at work. What is worrying is the fact that reports of GBV are often dismissed by the police who perceive the issue as a private matter for families, rather than a criminal matter for the courts.

It is a fact that GBV in its many forms can affect the health of people who are the targets, including the community in which they live. The impact of GBV on a woman's employment has clear adverse consequences for her economic security and independence. This is a concern that has not been widely addressed. Hence we met here today to address the issue.

Since the health consequences of GBV and sexual harassment in the workplace include, depression, anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder, we believe that this might be the cause of concerning rate of absenteeism and the increasing number of incapacity leave cases in the education sector. These cases sometimes result in educators being deemed discharged from work because they fail to show up for work for a period of more than 14 days.

In South Africa the safety of employees is guaranteed both at common law and in a number of statutes. Every employee has the right to be treated with dignity and respect in the workplace. Therefore, women should not have to suffer the consequences of losing their jobs either because they have been victims of GBV or Sexual Harassment or because they have chosen to take action to stop it.

If I may highlight on this, our Constitution provides for the right to equality and condemns any form of unfair discrimination. It also guarantees every employee the right to fair labour practices. The Employment Equity Act condemns and discourages any form of harassment. Not forgetting the Occupational Health and Safety Act which provides that the employer must as far as is reasonably practicable provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risk to the health of employees. The Labour Relations Act also takes the protection against sexual harassment, by providing that a dismissal is

automatically unfair if the reason for the dismissal is that the employee made a report of sexual harassment.

Programme Director, allow me to say this encouraging words to our women in the workforce, I would like to encourage you to let your talent and passion thrive, regardless of your age, looks or gender. Stand up for what you believe in. Do not allow anyone to make you feel worthless. Speak up against GBV and sexual harassment.

THANK YOU