Media Statement

COMMITTEE ON WOMEN ENGAGES COMMISSION ON GENDER EQUALITY ON ITS REPORTS

The Commission for Gender Equality (CGE) appeared before the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities yesterday to table three reports on the Choice of the Termination of Pregnancy, the Government Emergency Response Action Plan (ERAP) against Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) and the Convention of the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women.

The report on the termination of pregnancy was to determine the service offered, its funding model, base packages related to counselling, social support, public participation, promotion of the service, referrals, staffing issues. This is so as to assess how the provisions of the Termination of Pregnancy Act assist in enhancing the reproductive and sexual rights of women.

 According to the commission’s CEO, Ms Jamela Robertson, access to termination of pregnancy is still a challenge, as it provokes issues of conscious for some healthcare practioners. “But we impress upon them that this Act was enacted to prevent the unnecessary death of women due the unavailability of this service in our healthcare system.”

The committee heard that the national Department of Health uses the equitable share model to fund the termination of pregnancies in various provinces. However, there is no data to indicate if funding is being distributed equally. Nonetheless, the service is being promoted through staff training, media advertisements, posters and public participation education to raise awareness about where terminations can be obtained.

 The second report dealt with the Government Emergency Response Action Plan (ERAP) on GBV and Femicide, which led to the establishment of an interim committee. Despite the timely nature of the intervention, however, “there is no coherent plan for its implementation. And there is no plan to assess required resources and the capacitate of government departments that are key stakeholders in achieving its objectives,” Ms Robertson stated.

Nonetheless, out 650 social workers needed, 200 have been appointed and, out of 74 recommended prosecutors, more 50 have been appointed in the fight against GBV.

Despite that, she insisted, much needs to be done to reconfigure the accountability architecture of ERAP and to set achievable targets. “Short-term economic empowerment targets, such as preferential procurement for women, has not been met. And plans to achieve long-term targets relating to procurement of land for women are far from being realised.”

On GCE’s report on the Convention on the Elimination of all from of Discrimination Against Women, Ms Robertson stated that South Africa has made progress. To date, a gender machinery is in place and there is a conscious endeavour to implement gender equality instruments to deal with gender discriminations in all spheres of our society. But all these good intentions are dogged by GBVF.

During the question session Ms Nazley Sharif, a committee member, registered her concern about the proliferation of back-street abortion facilities and wanted to know what the CGE is doing about that. The CGE CEO responded: “There’s a need to expand the termination of pregnancy facilities equitably to discourage women from utilising these back street facilities that endanger their reproductive health.”

Asked by another committee member Ms Fikile Masiko if is there an equitable approach to funding because termination of pregnancy facilities are not available in rural areas. Ms Robertson said: “How these facilities are funded by the national health department is yet to be made clear to us.” But according to our findings, she added: “there’s a lack of standardised or uniform approach as to the number of facilities in a given province determined by either its population or geography. And that concerns us.”

The Chairperson of the Portfolio Committee on Women, Youth and Person with Disabilities, Ms Nonhlanhla Ndaba, wanted to know if CGE has shared its findings with the health department and the new council on GBVF. The chairperson of the CGE, Ms Tamara Mathebula replied: “We will engage the department and the council to look at the necessary legislation that could create an environment to eradicate GBVF.” She added: “We are also engaging the justice system to discuss the granting of bail to offenders of GBVF and the handling of the sex offenders register.”

Ms Ndaba asked how the committee can best assist the commission and Ms Mathebula replied: “We would like the committee to assist us to have a joint meeting with all the committees and departments that are our stakeholders to be privy to our challenges and recommendations that our reports have come up with if we were to advance our mandate.”

When the chairperson asked what progress the CGE has made to some of the issues highlighted in its report, its CEO responded: “Progress on the recommendations of our reports will only be reflected on our 22/23 report.”

Ms Nonhlanhla Ndaba, promised: “We will carve a way forward to have a joint meeting with all committees and department that are stakeholders of your mandate.” And we will, she assured CGE delegates, make reasonable recommendations to ensure that the recommendations of your reports are implemented.”

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