**MEDIA STATEMENT**

**MULTI-PARTY WOMEN’S CAUCUS COMMENDS FOCUS ON ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT FOR 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM CAMPAIGN**

**Parliament, Friday, 25 November 2022 –** The Multi-Party Women’s Caucus (MPWC) has welcomed the focus on economic emancipation in the government programmes planned for the 16 Days of Activism of No Violence against Women and Children.

Committee Chairperson Ms Nkhensani Kate Bilankulu said the MPWC was briefed yesterday by the Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities; the South African Police Service (SAPS); and the Department of Justice and Correctional Services. “We note that the campaign is a year long, but that the 16 days between 25 November and 10 December is a period for focused reflection on violence and abuse experienced by women and girls in all their diversity.”

The committee heard that the campaign takes place annually from 25 November – International Day of No Violence against Women – until 10 December, which is International Human Rights Day. The Department of Women, Youth and Persons with Disabilities said that given the heightened levels of violence in South Africa against women; girls; children; people with disabilities; the elderly; the LGBTQIA+ community; women migrant workers, refugees and asylum seekers; and sex workers, the campaign has over the years evolved into a 365-days-a-year programme to fight gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF).

The department told the committee that the proposed theme for this year is “Socio-economic Rights and Empowerment to build Women’s Resilience against Gender-based Violence and Femicide: Connect, Collaborate, Contract!”. The theme draws on that of the 2022 National Women’s Month, in order to ensure a continuous programmatic approach, with emphasis on both the social and economic empowerment of women. The intention is to build women’s resilience to be able to walk away from threats of GBV and femicide. Several economic opportunities and programmes form part of this year’s activities.

The SAPS told the committee that 1 019 police stations currently have victim-friendly rooms (VFRs). The medium-term plan is to establish a further 139 countrywide over the next three years. The committee heard that if the need arises to provide overnight accommodation, arrangements are made with nearby shelters and the Department of Social Development. The committee heard that the involvement of non-governmental organisations in this regard is permitted only if they are working in close cooperation with the SAPS and Department of Social Development.

The committee heard that SAPS has established GBV desks at all police stations by 31 March 2022 to improve the handling of police reports related to GBV. These desks are an engagement platform at police station level (rather than physical desks) to give the necessary support to GBVF victims and their families. This service is rendered by a team of SAPS personnel dedicated to ensuring that GBV-related matters are dealt with at police stations appropriately, while avoiding secondary victimisation.

SAPS indicated that since the establishment of the NPA/SAPS Project in July 2021, 20 747 cases were prioritised for DNA analysis, as per court-directed requests.

The Department of Justice and Correctional Services told the committee that all 299 courts attached to regional divisions, including the Ministerial Advisory Task Team on the Adjudication of Sexual Offences (MATTSO) courts. A MATTSO court is defined as a regional court dealing exclusively with sexual offences cases. The committee heard that there is no specific crime called GBV, and so the department collects data on sexual offences and domestic violence matters, whilst the National Prosecuting Authority collects prosecution outputs in sexual offences and GBV-related femicide cases.

The MPWC also heard about the backlog in sexual offences cases from April to July 2022. There is a pending caseload of 16 781 and, of these, 6 026 are backlog cases. Waiting for DNA reports adds more pressure to the volume of such cases.

A total of 3 856 criminal cases of domestic violence were registered and, of these, 348 were backlog cases. A total of 284 GBV-related femicide cases were finalised with a verdict and 271 of these cases were finalised with a conviction. A total of 221 verdicts were handed down in intimate partner femicide cases and 206 of these were finalised with a conviction. This amounts to a 93.2 per cent conviction rate in intimate partner femicide cases.

Ms Bilankulu said eradicating GBV and femicide is not just the responsibility of government, but of each and every South African. “We note the focus on economic emancipation and commend this, so that women in vulnerable situations are aware that there is indeed a way out. We would like to appeal to all South Africans to hold hands and work together to rid our beautiful country of this demon that has plagued our rainbow nation. Together, we can do it.”

**ISSUED BY THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMUNICATION SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE CHAIRPERSON OF THE MULTI-PARTY WOMEN’S CAUCUS, MS NKHENSANI KATE BILANKULU.**

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