



Dear Fellow South African,

It is nearly three decades since the United Nations first initiated the global campaign of 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.

It runs from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to International Human Rights Day on 10 December.

Despite the groundswell of public support for this campaign and many others like it, we are still unfortunately a long way from realising a world free of sexism, discrimination and violence against women and girls.

Despite our best efforts as the international community, as national governments and as civil society, gender-based violence remains a feature of the lives of millions of women and girls around the world.

The reality is that legislative and policy measures instituted by governments cannot alone rid us of this problem.

The 16 Days of Activism campaign affirms the need for all sectors of society to play their part in the fight against gender-based violence.

It is up to us all, as individuals and communities, to bring about the change we so sorely need.

It is about driving fundamental change in societal attitudes that allow sexism, chauvinism and patriarchy to thrive.

As we gear up for this year's campaign, we acknowledge the invaluable work being done by those outside government to combat gender-based violence.

I speak here of the volunteers at shelters, at police station victim support offices and rape crisis centres, and who staff victim-support hotlines.

We thank the housemothers and managers in our care centres for children, the elderly and other vulnerable groups who have been affected by gender-based violence.

We are grateful for the dedication of our social workers, both in government and in grassroots organisations, who provide critical psycho-social services to survivors and their families.

We acknowledge the counsellors and sponsors who are a lifeline both for survivors and those perpetrators of gender-based violence whose lives have been ravaged by alcoholism and substance abuse.

I commend the professionals who work with perpetrators; running workshops and programmes and supporting efforts towards their rehabilitation and reintegration into society.

Above all, we salute the neighbour who opens her home to a vulnerable mother and her children; the co-worker who accompanies a survivor of violence to the hospital, police station or a shelter; and the friend who does not stand by and watch a woman or a child being abused but intervenes.

In paying tribute to the health workers, police men and women, prosecutors and judges on the frontline, we should not forget those whose work is not publicised, but is no less important or impactful.

Women form the majority of those engaged in care work and it is in the main unpaid. Acknowledging its important contribution not just to the economy but to society, is key to advancing gender equality.

During the lockdown to contain the COVID-19 pandemic we witnessed first-hand the integral role played by the NGO and community-based sector in providing support to vulnerable women and children.

They worked with government to ensure that the basic needs of women and children in shelters were met, and worked with the Solidarity Fund to ensure there was adequate personal protective equipment in shelters where they were needed.

We know all too well that while it is government that adopts policy, it is our NGOs and community workers who are closest to where our people are. They are a barometer of implementation on the ground.

This country's women and children, and indeed all the people of South Africa will forever remain grateful for the work of our robust, activist and principled civil society organisations and workers.

Beyond its devastating effects on the health, safety and well-being of women and girls, this insidious problem has significant social, political and economic impacts.

According to a 2017 study, the economic cost of gender-based violence in South Africa is between R28 billion and R42.4 billion a year. This includes the social services, shelter and health care needed to respond effectively to gender-based violence.

Individuals and families bear the greatest proportion of costs – from reduced income to replacement of broken property, to transportation to seek care or attend

trial. Furthermore, the productivity of women in abusive relationships is also negatively affected.

There is also the so-called second-generation impact, such as the cost of services for children and others who are affected.

It is clear then that not only is eradicating gender-based violence a moral and human rights imperative, it is also key to us realising our developmental potential as a country.

As we begin the 16 Days of Activism campaign on Wednesday, let us remember that we all share a common goal: to turn the tide on this scourge.

Let us continue in the spirit of mutual respect and partnership to make this year's 16 Days of Activism campaign one that is impactful and that makes a difference.

By the time the campaign concludes on International Human Rights Day, let us be all the closer to achieving a society in which the rights of women and girls are upheld and protected.

With best regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Cyril Ramaphosa". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent loop at the end of the last name.