



PRESS RELEASE

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LAW SOCIETY WELCOMES RE-ESTABLISHMENT OF SEXUAL OFFENCES COURTS; CALLS FOR EFFICIENCY IN MAINTENANCE MATTERS AFFECTING WOMEN AND CHILDREN

The Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) welcomes the announcement by Justice Minister Jeff Radebe that a number of sexual offences courts will reopen this year. 'This is a small, but significant step on the path to providing urgently needed and appropriate assistance to some of the most vulnerable members of our society – mainly women and children – who, as we have read in shocking reports even this week, are increasingly being brutalised and victimised,' say LSSA Co-Chairpersons, Kathleen Matolo-Dlepu and David Bekker. They add: 'We trust that the Minister will ensure that the courts are properly resourced to provide the victim-centred, prompt, responsive and effective recourse for those affected by the scourge of sexual offences in our country.'

'We are, however, saddened that it took more highly publicised deaths through domestic violence, rapes, sexual assaults and suicides because of a lack of support from the government and its authorities, to achieve this earlier,' says Susan Abro, Chairperson of the LSSA's Family Law specialist committee.

The LSSA welcomes the report and recommendations by the Ministerial Advisory Task Team on the Adjudication of Sexual Offences Matters and its relevant committees will consider it. 'At first glance we would support a recommendation that the courts should have dedicated judicial officers rather than rotating staff. Lack of consistency and delays may result in these courts being as ineffective as the maintenance and domestic violence courts. We support specialised training for presiding officers and staff at these courts. Family law specialists should be appointed as presiding officers. Sitting judicial officers and National Prosecuting Authority staff in all courts should be encouraged to become committed to and specialists in family and gender matters, with appropriate career rewards for efficiency and effectiveness. This will lead to the strong and effective justice system we require to deter those who commit these heinous crimes against the vulnerable members of our society,' says Ms Abro.

Ms Abro adds: 'During Women's Month – and indeed throughout the year – we should be aware that there are other forms of abuse and harassment, such as the failure to pay maintenance, and the secondary abuse of those victims by poorly resourced courts. This includes the lack of human resources allocated by the Minister, the NPA and the judiciary, towards assisting victims of non-payment of maintenance. The lack of fast, efficient service in either the civil, family and criminal courts, in order to assist victims – who are in the main women and children -- to obtain the payment of maintenance and arrears maintenance, should not be overlooked.'

This is, hopefully, the first step on the way to the improvement of the system which is designed to support and protect the most vulnerable members of society.

ISSUED ON BEHALF OF THE CO-CHAIRPERSONS OF THE LAW SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA, KATHLEEN MATOLO-DLEPU AND DAVID BEKKER

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Editor's note:

The Law Society of South Africa brings together its six constituent members – the Cape Law Society, the KwaZulu-Natal Law Society, the Law Society of the Free State, the Law Society of the Northern Provinces, the Black Lawyers Association and the National Association of Democratic Lawyers – in representing South Africa's 21 400 attorneys and 5 800 candidate attorneys.