



JOINT PRESS STATEMENT BY THE SOUTH AFRICAN POLICE SERVICE AND THE LAW SOCIETY OF SOUTH AFRICA

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LAW SOCIETY AND SAPS ANNOUNCE JOINT PROJECT TO IMPROVE TREATMENT OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE VICTIMS AND MATTERS

The South African Police Service (SAPS) and the Law Society of South Africa (LSSA) are pleased to announce a joint initiative that aims to better support the victims of domestic violence who opt to report crimes against women and children to the SAPS.

'The initiative stems from the public perception that the victims of domestic and gender-based violence do not get the appropriate assistance and treatment in every matter when they approach the SAPS. Attorneys and police officers are duty-bound to ensure that victims receive sensitive and professional service when reporting domestic violence matters so that the matters can be processed successfully through the criminal justice system. The LSSA hopes to strengthen the message that domestic violence will not be tolerated on the one hand, and on the other, to assist police officers in dealing with the victims of this scourge appropriately,' say LSSA Co-Chairpersons Kathleen Matolo-Dlepu and David Bekker.

The joint initiative envisages attorneys – with the support of relevant NGOs – supplementing and complementing the current training provided to SAPS station commanders, trainers and other senior police officials, by offering information sessions on how to deal appropriately with domestic violence matters and with the victims of domestic violence who approach the SAPS to report these matters. Those in leadership positions will then be better placed to sensitise those who deal with domestic violence issues at grass-roots level, where the victims report the abuse to the SAPS.

The LSSA approached the SAPS at the end of 2012 through Susan Abro and Martha Mbhele – respectively the chairpersons of its Family Law and Gender Committees – to identify the challenges being experienced by both attorneys and the SAPS in dealing with the implementation of the Domestic Violence Act. 'We must prioritise crimes against women and children and we need to change the attitudes of people who deal with victims of these crimes, from a police aspect and also from a public perception aspect. As a society we are increasingly becoming immune to violent crime,' says Ms Abro. 'Attorneys will be providing their services to assist the SAPS *pro bono*, as we are committed to doing what we can to break the cycle of violence being experienced by the

more vulnerable members of our society. We are confident that this will be the first phase in an ongoing joint project,' says Ms Mbhele.

Major General Susan Pienaar, SAPS Head of Crime Prevention in the Visible Policing Division said: 'In our initial discussions with the LSSA we agreed that we have the same objectives and concerns in ensuring that we come to a better comprehension of the experiences of domestic violence victims. We need to inculcate an understanding of the importance of dealing correctly with domestic violence matters.'

She adds: 'Every case that is reported to the SAPS is an opportunity to intervene. We want a cadre of police leaders and trainers who can guide and assist operational police officers on the ground to deal with what are often difficult situations that require critical decisions to be made even by junior officers. One of the principle aspects of the National Crime Prevention Strategy is to break the cycle of violence which often starts at home. This is one of the causal factors for violent crime in South Africa. Any initiative to make inroads into breaking that cycle is welcomed.'

***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.