

## **Press Statement on the recent GBV outbreak in Eswatini - December 2023**

Kwakha Indvodza (KI) acknowledges the efforts to address GBV that His Majesty's Government of Eswatini has made in recent years, including non-governmental actors, civil society, faith-based organisations, traditional leaders, private & public sector, and individuals. However, the levels of violence have not been reduced. Instead, GBV has continued and seems to be escalating in Eswatini, as evidenced by the recent alarming headlines and statistics of murder. While all are affected by GBV, the reality is that women and children are facing the brunt of this scourge.

There is also a growing number of femicide cases – these killings of women of all ages, from all walks of life, is creating an environment of fear and insecurity amongst women and children throughout the country. ***It is important that we remember that behind the statistics and other data, are actual human beings.*** These are people with hopes and dreams whose experience of GBV violates their rights to security, bodily autonomy, physical and mental health, and in the worst cases, life and the impact of violence can manifest in a young person/adult becoming a perpetrator of violence, or a victim/survivor, thus creating a sustained cycle of violence within the society.

Despite the general public consensus that GBV has reached proportions requiring intensified action, we have been disappointed in disjoint actions from all levels of society in dealing with this GBV outbreak using a multifaceted approach through national actions in political, programmatic, social, and financial mechanisms. At a practical level, this means greater numbers of women and children being at risk of violence and femicide; fewer numbers of GBV survivors receiving support, thus prolonging the trauma and negative impact of the violence experienced; fewer numbers of perpetrators being held accountable; and ultimately, a continued rise in GBV cases, thus leading to reduced productivity and decline in socio-economic growth of the nation. There remain serious gaps within the GBV response system due to inadequate resources and capacity and most of the responsible structures are overwhelmed by the current levels of cases they attend.

Acknowledging that Eswatini has a GBV outbreak will catalyse a unified national response to comprehensively address these issues. When an emergency is declared, not only are resources to address it prioritised at national level, but other resource envelopes - that would not ordinarily benefit Eswatini, due to the country's middle-income status - can be accessed.

A unified and appropriately resourced national response is the only solution to addressing this scourge speedily and systematically. A national response would include all sectors: e.g., health for medical, psychological assessments, economic support, justice & rule of law, education and correction

***RECOGNISING THE GRAVITY OF GBV, IT SHOULD NOT BE TOLERATED IN OUR COMMUNITIES AND MUST NOT BE TOLERATED BY THE STATE. WE THEREFORE REITERATE THE CALL FOR GOVERNMENT TO DECLARE GBV AS A NATIONAL EMERGENCY.***