

Public Statement:

Re: Promoting social cohesion, self-care and peaceful communities: SADC Human Rights Netball Tournament for Grassroots Womxn Human Rights Defenders (WHRDs).

Release Date: 10 April 2023

The African Diaspora Workers Network (ADWN), Umphakatsi Eco-Peace Village (UEPV) and Community Organising Working Group (COWG) with the support of the Southern Human Rights Defenders Network (SHRDN) hosted a Human Rights Netball Tournament on the 2nd of April 2023. The first tournament was held at Sharpeville in commemoration of the International Human Rights Day during the 16 Days of Activism in December 2022 and was attended by 70 participants including children. Hosted at George Tabe Stadium at Sharpeville Memorial site, the idea was to observe and reflect on the meaning and significance of those who sacrificed their lives to ensure South Africa becomes the "Rainbow Nation " it is today. This was a 'delayed but not forgotten match' as human rights and social justice is what we stand for in our everyday lives!

It was undeniably, a well decorated tournament in which ten (10) teams from grassroots communities participated in this seminal 2023 National Human Rights Netball Tournament. More than 100 grassroots WHRDs from East Rand, Johannesburg South and West Rand in Gauteng Province converged in unison to commemorate the historic 21st of March 1960 massacres in which poor Black human rights defenders selflessly sacrificed their lives fighting racism and social injustice. In South Africa, March has been declared human rights month, due to the past apartheid gross violations that happened in this month. Apartheid has been declared by the United Nations as a crime against humanity. In the same month of March 1960, on 26 March, dubbed the Atteridgeville Massacre, about 11 youth and women were killed while hundreds were severely injured.

This intervention is aligning to key government policies for interventions related to vulnerable communities such as the National Strategic Plan on GBVF; the National Strategy on Women Peace and Security as well as the National Action Plan to Combat Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and related Intolerances (NAP).

In its endeavour to promote social cohesion, the Gauteng Department of Sports sponsored the Human Rights Trophy, netball kit and balls in appreciation of this grassroots netball initiative. In addition, representatives from Falcon College including community-based organisations joined this convening and conveyed message of solidarity. Phumi Maduna, a prominent reggae artist and champion against GBV, graced the occasion and shared some exciting nuggets to cheer up participants. Artists played and continue to serve a very critical role in our everyday struggles for social justice and cohesion. Indeed, music brings not only joy and vibrancy to our broader national social cohesion strategy but also promotes unity, solidarity, self-care and well-being. During the struggle against apartheid and its 'cousin' racial capitalism, WHRDs such as Phumi Maduna, Miriam Makeba and others in the music industry were targeted for standing up to racism through music.

Today, neoliberal capitalism has ravaged our communities in brutal ways. As a result, community solidarity has fragmented while anger is targeted on the most vulnerable population groupings such as women, children, LGBTIQ+, migrants, asylum seekers and refugees.

The rising cost of living, climate change as well as ecological crisis have exacerbated poverty and hunger and the burden of unpaid care work for grassroots womxn. This calls for the need for sports and leisure to sustain mental health and well-being. South Africa is currently working towards a framework for a new social compact to address the triple challenges of poverty, unemployment and inequality. Indeed, the three 'cousins' of poverty, unemployment and expanding inequalities continue to haunt us as a nation. The ramifications being increased substance abuse, high levels of crime and GBV. Social cohesion, national healing, food security, decent employment are integral components of a transformative social compact. In the words of one of the organisers of this Tournament, Thebogo Malefofane, "*No-one should go to bed hungry*"!

The Human Rights Netball Tournament served as a virtuous platform to forge self-care networks, social cohesion and transnational feminist solidarity as well as forging of a common agenda and tolerance against all odds. Gender-based violence is pervasive and all womxn are prone to violence regardless of race, nationality or class. Henceforward, we all have to unite in our fight against this scourge. It is our hope that the programme will go a long way in advancing international understanding, protection and peace through sisterhood and brotherhood.

This public statement is issued in solidarity and in our quest for social cohesion, psychosocial, healing and self-care interventions for all WHRDs within SADC and across the continent. In particular, we pay tribute to all WHRDs who include among them, the wife of the late human rights defender lawyer – Thulani Maseko in Swaziland. We wish her rapid healing from the untimely and painful bereavement at a time when the entire work is facing poly socio-economic and ecological crises. Love, peace and solidarity!

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#LoudNoGbvPovertyHunger
#WHRDs4SocialCohesion
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#AfricanBrotherhood
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This press statement was released by the African Diaspora Workers Network, Umphakatsi Eco-Peace Village, and the Community Organising Working Group on 06 April 2023.