

ZABALAZA NEWS

★★★ for freedom from authority and capitalism ★★★

ZACF Statement on Violence and Harassment Against Women.

All too often across South Africa women are assaulted and abused at the hands of sexist and chauvinist men. If a woman wears long pants, she may be stripped and humiliated; if she wears a mini-skirt she may be assaulted; if she loves another woman she may be raped and/ or murdered; or all of the above just for being a woman. In this country, in which everyone is so proud of their so-called progressive constitution, a woman is not free to be herself unless the image of herself conforms to that narrow-minded image of how a woman should act and behave held by so many bigoted men.

The statements of Jacob Zuma during his rape trial reflect the prevalence of such sexist attitudes within the leadership of the ruling party and might very well encourage such attitudes in others. All the more so now that the ANC has chosen Zuma as its leader. Contrary to the claims of the Cosatu bosses, Zuma is no friend of workers or oppressed people, but a reactionary sexist traditionalist.

We welcome the mass action on Friday 29th of February, made by the Remmoho Women's Forum (an initiative of the Anti-Privatisation Forum) in protest against the assault on a young woman at the Noord street taxi rank in Johannesburg. We were disgusted, however, to learn of the aggressive and sexist attitudes displayed by the taxi drivers towards the protesters.

As long as women are abused, assaulted and publicly humiliated simply for being a woman or for decisions they take relating to their lifestyle we support the freedom of people to take to the streets to demand an end to this victimisation. In fact we urge them to do so. As anarchists we defend the freedom of people to dress and behave however they choose, as long as this does not infringe on the freedom of others. The decision by this young woman to wear a miniskirt in no way infringed on the rights or freedom of others, yet

she was assaulted by a group of cowardly men for the way she chose to dress. We strongly condemn this attack.

We want our streets to be safe for women to walk, without having to worry about being raped or assaulted, regardless of how they dress or their sexual orientation. We therefore support the call to make Noord street taxi rank safe for women and for everyone else. We are a bit concerned, however, with the measures that the Remmoho Women's Forum called for.



In particular we are concerned by the call for increased police surveillance in and around Noord street taxi rank, noting also that the Democratic Alliance has raised concerns about inadequate surveillance in the area. Although we acknowledge that there are probably few other measures that could have an immediate impact on making the area safer, we are sceptical about the role of the police in this situation, as well as being wary of the long-term impacts of increased surveillance. We recall that police have often been the perpetrators of assaults and rapes (for example the constable in

Amersfoort accused of raping two young girls on January 14, or the man employed by the SAPS as a clerk and reservist arrested for the abduction and rape of three women in November 2007) and that, because of the authority they hide behind, they are seldom brought to justice for their crimes. It is also known that the South African police have a history of covering up rape, and of protecting certain perpetrators. In the long run increased police surveillance will make the police stronger and lead to a Big Brother state in which we would be harassed and assaulted not only by sexist taxi drivers and criminals but by the police as well. Homeless people, immigrants and women, amongst others, are already being harassed and abused by the police on a daily basis, and investing the police with more control is only going to make this problem worse. The police, like Thabo Mbeki, Jacob Zuma and the rest of the ruling elite, are not accountable to the people.

Ideally, as an alternative way to put pressure on the taxi associations to meet our demands, we would prefer to see a mass boycott similar to the bus boycotts of the 40s and 50s. We recognise however that given the present political conditions, this is perhaps highly unlikely and probably difficult. We encourage people to vote with their feet, though, and if people identify certain taxi drivers who are abusive to their passengers they should try not to use those taxis. If the harassment carries on we support any calls for mass action, and believe that people should begin working towards mass boycotts if sexist taxi drivers do not change their attitudes. This would show them that they depend on their passengers and the whole country that women deserve to be treated with respect.

We would also prefer things like community and women's self-defense groups similar to those of the 80s as an alternative to increased police surveillance, because we

believe that the police cannot be relied upon to defend the interests of anyone other than the rich and powerful.

We fully support the rights of women to defend themselves; by whatever means necessary, from chauvinist attack. In the long run we

believe that the world will only start treating women as human beings and not as inferior to men when women and men from the popular classes organise and struggle to put an end to sexist and patriarchal oppression. We recognise that the ruling elite benefits from the division between

men and women and that it is in the interests of both working class and poor men and women to organise together against this oppression.

A working class united will never be defeated.

HIV/ Aids is a Disease of the Poor

It is ridiculous to think that the whole world is laughing at South African politicians who are constantly denying the devastating reality of HIV/Aids and yet they don't change. To say that eating beetroot or garlic is a precautionary step in the fight against the virus is as reckless as to think that showering after having sex (or even raping someone!) prevents infection. But the real issue here is that the Government's misinformation and constant denial is costing the people of this country their lives or their families. One just has to wonder if the ruling party really thinks we are that gullible. How can they continue to deny the connection between HIV and Aids, when right before them the workers they so desperately need in order to keep their capitalist system running are dying from this illness? There are many answers but one of the most important is that they are saving money. If they accepted the virus as a real threat it would mean they would have to spend money on treatment (antiretrovirals - ARV's) and prevention. The political leaders of this country are sacrificing people's lives so they may indulge themselves with new cars, houses and vacations abroad. Unfortunately with the ANC having the support of Cosatu and the SACP it seems very little is being done to keep the working class and working poor safe.

What is HIV/Aids?

Aids, a disease that under present circumstances cannot be healed, is caused by the Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) which grows for a couple of years after infection without breaking out. This process of growing can take up to ten years. Because of this it is often hard to diagnose the symptoms properly at an early stage, which may cause confusion and distress in families. Also because of this long period and that it seems to come out of nothing makes many people think that HIV/Aids is caused by witchcraft. It also seems to primarily affect the most vulnerable, the poor, the youth and the innocent. Sometimes parents are

wrongfully accused of killing or bewitching their children when they die and people who suffer from the disease get stigmatised.

HIV/Aids in South Africa

HIV/Aids came at a bad time for the ANC, at a time when the ANC wanted to go back to its African roots. A disease that can so far only be treated (but never healed) in Western biomedical ways is not something that fits into the concept of "African renaissance" (which is basically the same as Western capitalism and not at all beneficial to African people). The ANC tried to make the disease look like a Western disease. A legacy that has to do with the racist medical system under apartheid is that many people, especially in rural areas, are still afraid of biomedical doctors.

The following examples have been taken from South African literature on the topic as well as from discussions with people affected by the disease.

Religious ideas and some traditions contribute towards the spread of the virus. Some churches say that if you use condoms you are inviting people to promiscuity. Further, many people think that to use condoms within a relationship means that you don't trust your partner. These arguments may be right or wrong; the thing is however that we never know if we can really trust our partners with our own life. To use condoms within a relationship may not only save your life but that of your partner as well.

Scarring and circumcision as a form of initiation can be dangerous when one blade is used for a whole group of people. In these threatening times such customs do not have to be reconsidered but we have to insist on clean sterile razors to be used for every individual. We need to put more pressure on the government to supply people with these. In the meantime we need to be careful about such practices.

Also, some churches and traditional healers who say they can heal HIV/Aids are another serious

threat to the well-being of the people in this country, especially the poor and uneducated. HIV/Aids cannot be healed, no matter what some people tell you, it can only be treated to extend one's life expectation and reduce suffering. For this we do not blame traditional healers or tradition in general because many traditional healers now know that HIV/Aids is not a disease that is affected by witchcraft or can be healed.

HIV/AIDS and poverty

HIV/Aids is a disease that has to do directly with poverty. Statistics show that in poor areas, especially in poor urban areas and squatter camps, the percentage of people with HIV/Aids is significantly higher than the average percentage in the country in general. This doesn't have to do with different sexual practices or whatever some people say to blame everything on a particular culture. It has to do directly with poverty. Many people live under conditions that are inhuman. Poverty and the socio-economic conditions we live in affect our health. So, HIV/Aids is not caused by poverty but many more poor people have it due to various reasons.

There are many more factors why HIV/Aids directly relates to poverty, not only bad living conditions. Poor people also have less education because we live in a (capitalist) society where you can only get good education if you can afford it. Education is crucial to get informed about health and diseases and how to avoid them.

HIV/Aids treatment (ARVs) is expensive. We are, after all, speaking about the pharmaceutical industry, one of the most corrupt industries in the world, which tries to make money off people's health. ARVs should be distributed freely and the government could do more about it than it currently does.

Condoms are the only thing next to abstinence (and abstinence is not a realistic way for the vast majority of the population) that helps in preventing HIV/Aids. However, they cost money and the free,

government issued condoms are not good enough and it has happened quite often that they even have holes in them. Therefore, we need to put pressure on the government to provide free and quality condoms.

Who are the guilty?

No one is guilty of HIV/Aids. It is a disease like any other. It was not invented by politicians to kill black Africans or gay people. It is also not a punishment from god. People who are HIV positive are therefore not guilty themselves, yet they suffer from stigmas that say they have been bewitched or punished by god for their sexual behaviour. This is not true. Anyone is open to infection. Even monogamous wives are able to get HIV/Aids therefore it is always safer to use condoms and to do tests.

Another reason why many people get HIV/Aids is rape. South Africa has the highest rape rate in the world. Many girls and women get raped because they live in areas where they can't protect themselves enough, in a society where women are (increasingly) seen as sex objects.

Rape is not an easy thing to talk about; so many girls who were raped are too afraid to tell someone about it and do not take tests. Because HIV/Aids is so widely feared and people who have the disease are stigmatised, it leads to the situation that many people are too afraid to make their status public which leads to further spread of the disease.

A person who has HIV/Aids is not a witch; it is a person that is very likely innocent and contracted it at no fault of their own. Pointing fingers at other people won't help, we have to work together and fight the system which creates poverty, and that is the capitalist economic system and the government... *any government*. They are not concerned with peoples' lives, they are concerned with wealth, more specifically, their own wealth.

What to do?

Condoms are the only way to avoid getting HIV/Aids when you want to have sex. But a condom is only as useful as the capacity to negotiate its use. That means many girls and women don't have the power to persuade their husbands/ lovers to use a condom. Men must understand that it is for their safety as well.

A very dangerous myth that is doing its rounds in South Africa is to say that one can get rid of the virus when sleeping with a virgin and thus child rape increases. This is total nonsense and will destroy the child's life forever.

To say that all people with Aids should be thrown out of the community is not the solution. We should care for the sick and not blame them for something that is not their fault.

Aids has to do with poverty and the different roles of men and women in our society. As long as it is okay for men to have more than one wife or sexual partner (in both the

traditional and modern way) Aids will be a problem.

We should not accuse other people of witchcraft. The only people we need to be afraid of – and can therefore be considered as witches – are politicians who are not doing enough and are playing with our lives.

- * We should protect ourselves and each other and be respectful.
- * We need to talk openly about HIV/Aids and help people who suffer from it.
- * We should talk with our partners about it and make use of the free HIV/Aids tests.
- * We need to respect women as human beings and not sex objects.
- * We need to put pressure on the government to get acceptable free condoms.
- * We should stand united against anyone who is not doing enough about HIV/Aids.
- * We have to demand free medical aid and free ARVs from the government.
- * We should not stigmatise each other but direct our anger at the government and those who profit off our misery instead.
- * We need to struggle together in order to finally get our demands for basic human rights met: we are entitled to the right to be healthy, the right to free access to hospitals and schools, free and safe condoms and proper sex education.

Real Human Freedom Not Fake Human Rights

South Africa is said to have one of the most progressive constitutions in the world. It enshrines the rights of every person, of every background, from workers and immigrants to women and homosexuals. As such you would think that, especially for people from oppressed groups, South Africa would be a safe haven.

But if you look a bit closer you will surely see that, despite all the rights we hold on paper, people living in South Africa are far from guaranteed a safe and enjoyable existence. Our so-called human rights, as enshrined by the constitution and gloated over by politicians, are violated on a daily basis.

Workers have the right to strike, but only if they first warn their bosses of their intentions and after they have exhausted all other avenues for addressing their concerns. Workers who decide to strike without first giving their boss a chance to hire scab labour, and even when they do - as we have recently witnessed with the excessive use of force by the SAPS on striking Samwu workers in the Nelson Mandela Bay Metropole (137 of whom were arrested and held over night after being shot at without warning) - are likely to be arrested, fired or violently attacked.

Workers do not have the right to decide what they produce and how they distribute it, and in what quantities, because everything that a

worker produces belongs to his or her boss - the owners of the factories and machines, those to whom the workers sell their labour for a wage in order to survive. In the constitution workers do not have the right to take over the factories and occupy the land, in order to produce the goods they need to survive, because that would be violating another sacred right, the property rights of the bosses and land-owners.

Under capitalism, the economic system of the world, people are allowed by law to own, buy and sell private property. Those who can afford to buy property, be it a piece of farm land or a factory and its machines, very often use this property to enrich themselves from

the labour of those who have no property, and thus have no choice but to work for a wage under the direction of those who have property. In this way the group of people who own private property - and it is a relatively small group - exploit the labour of those who do not own private property - a much larger group. They get rich through the labour of the poor, simply for having already been rich enough to buy property in the first place; and their right to exploit the workers and poor is protected by the same constitution which protects the rights of the workers not be exploited! Ironic, isn't it?

Similarly, the equal rights of women with men are written into the constitution and upheld by law, but, as recent events - such as that at Noord street - have once again shown, so too are these rights violated on a daily basis. Women in South Africa are not treated as the equals of men, they are harassed, abused, raped and degraded by virtue of the fact that they were born women. It matters very little to a woman who is beaten by her husband, or raped by a taxi driver, whether or not this is allowed under the constitution. What she cares about is not being raped, not being beaten. This is a security that cannot be guaranteed to her under the present capitalist system, because the same system that defends the rights of the bosses to exploit the workers, also relies on the patriarchal

oppression of women by men, in order to keep the poor and working class divided from itself, thus unable to find the strength to challenge the system which protects the rights of the propertied classes at the expense of the workers, poor and oppressed minorities.

We anarchist communists believe that constitutional human rights mean next to nothing as long as we are living in a world which thrives on the violent exploitation of the masses by a ruling minority, a system in which the majority of the population - the workers and poor - are divided from each other by means of sexism, racism, nationalism and religion. We believe that, as long as we live under the threat of starvation and imprisonment, oppression and exploitation, our human rights will never be safe. It is impossible for the workers and poor, for women and oppressed minorities to live in dignity under capitalism. As long as there is a price on our labour, as long as we are under threat of attack because of our identifies, and as long as we live under threat of unemployment, hunger and disease, our rights to live with dignity and free from violence will never be realised.

Under such circumstances, in which we find ourselves today - as many of us did under Apartheid - the only way to live with dignity is to take up the fight against the system of capitalism, the system which defends the profits and property of

the rich and powerful at the expense of the human rights of the exploited and oppressed. The only way to live with dignity is for us to live and struggle for a new system; a new world in which we are no longer divided, where there is no private property, and where we are all workers and in which we all have control over what we produce and how it is distributed, according to the principle "from each according to ability, to each according to need". A world in which, because we are all workers, and we all work for the benefit of our fellow human beings, we treat each other with the respect that each one of us deserves.

Capitalism cannot guarantee human rights for all, only real human freedom can guarantee and protect our rights, rights which are safeguarded by our belonging to an international community of free workers, not by writing them onto paper. If we had real freedom, there would be no need for the phony rights of the bourgeois constitutions of South Africa and other so-called democracies.

We are supposed to have the freedom of choice, but the only choice we have under capitalism is either to be exploited and oppressed, or to organise and resist.

Anarchist communists have chosen to organise and resist, to fight for a better future, and in so doing to live and die with dignity.

Join us.

FOR COMMUNITY AND WORKPLACE CONTROL BY WORKERS AND THE POOR!



ZABALAZA ANARCHIST COMMUNIST FRONT

★ postnet suite 47, private bag X1, fordsburg, south africa, 2033 ★

★ zacf@zabalaza.net ★ 084 946-4240