

GBV Protest March

Address by Professor Sibongile Muthwa, *Vice-Chancellor, Nelson Mandela University*

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Fellow members of the Nelson Mandela University Community

Even, as I stand here; in these sad, dark times...

Let me recognise and affirm the survivors of rape and sexual assault; and let me salute the brave network of staff, students and professionals, who tirelessly work in the GBV space; here at Mandela, and across the country. I also request that we observe a brief moment of silence in memory of those women who did not make it, and in particular those that were killed recently during Women's month.

Let me also acknowledge our international students and staff, especially those from our continent ... you are most welcome here at Mandela ... and we are embarrassed by the waves of attacks of foreign immigrants that are drowning our humanity.

We have to stand up; we have to protest; we have to fight, together ... this darkness that is overwhelming us.

Last week I shared with you the pain and agony for what is happening in our institution, our nation.

We are experiencing an unspeakable time, a gruesome year and one of the most horrid eras of human rights violations since the dawn of democracy in 1994.

We are our country, one which is an extremely violent world for women and children.

We are our university, one that is not yet safe for our female students and staff.

As a country and a university community, we stand ashamed and distraught. We have become our own monster.

The statistics are repulsive ... a woman is murdered every four hours ... and we have the world's fourth highest death rate due to 'interpersonal violence'. We bury friends, children, partners, colleagues, family, fellow humans ... on a daily, weekly basis. There is an onslaught on women and children: gender-based violence, rape, abductions, murder ... the list goes on.

How can it be that a country who is built on the idea of a human rights loses its way so dramatically? How can we hand ourselves so easily over to patriarchy and deadly masculinity?

What have become of men in our communities? What is happening with our men, young and old, in this country?

Why do we have such hatred and ill will for our fellow African brothers and sisters? Is our self-hate so overpowering and devastating?

This brutality must stop, in particular gender and sexually based violence ... and we must start here; at Mandela.

When we became Mandela University in July 2017, the then Deputy President Ramaphosa told us that this is not simply an exercise in corporate re-branding:

'It is a statement of intent.

It is a statement of values.

It makes a statement about justice, rehabilitation and reconciliation.

It starts to reshape our South African identity.

It helps us to move forward, together, as a people.

That is because Nelson Mandela embodied the best in us.

He represented the values which we South Africans, black and white, united in our diversity, cherish and uphold'.

This university, he continued, 'will have to liberate the minds of the oppressed and awaken them to the potential of African scholarship. It will have to remove the cloak of institutionalised racism and sexism. It will have to promote an African renaissance and contribute, through teaching and research, to the making of the African Century. This must be an African university that serves the continent and her people'.

As you can see, patriarchy with its cruel masculinity and xenophobia are not part of the Mandela vision; it is neither part of our university, nor our society.

In our university the 'toxic man' should not feel welcome ... the sexist, the racist and the xenophobe should flee from our university. In our university one should feel the NOUGHT in zero tolerance.

Let us get to work, together ... and intensify our efforts; and let us work on ourselves. Let us show courage and leadership wherever we are.

I call on all of us to join hands to:

- accelerate the establishment of the safe house for victims of GBV which we have committed to put in place as a matter of urgency
- build a grassroots movement against GBV at Mandela
- draft, with haste, a declaration against GBV to be signed by the entire university community and visitors
- collectively accelerate the review of policy so as to quicken the turn-around times of GBV cases

- assist the working group in developing a comprehensive gender transformation strategy for the university
- support the Women and Gender Studies Centre that will be launched on 3 October 2019
- fashion symbols that signify our values and anti-GBV stance to be displayed across the university spaces; these symbols and images should make the sexist and sex offender feel that this is not a place for them ...

We must wake up; because our humanity is at stake

Let us get to work; it's time! Ke Nako! It is time for United Action against GBV.