



16 Days of Activism on Violence against Women and Children

- Ring the Bell Campaign -

**Address delivered by Bishop Barry Wood, OMI,
Chairperson of Diakonia Council of Churches, on 6
December 2008 at Church Walk, Durban, City Hall,
Durban South Africa.**

Good morning.

I bring greetings to each and every one of you gathered here today. I greet you in the name of the One who loves us and promises us peace.

Of course the reason we are gathered here today is a sad one. It is a tragic reason. It is a reason, which we struggle to comprehend or fathom. It is – in fact – beyond all reason.

Last year we gathered here to stand in solidarity with the many thousands of women and children who are abused in our country every year. Standing here last year, Bishop Rubin Philip called for 10 seconds of silence, to hear the cries of someone being abused – because the reality was that a woman was raped every ten seconds in our country.

We are now told that every six seconds a woman is raped or abused.

This trend is beyond all reasoning. It just does not make sense.

Any form of violence, especially against defenceless and innocent women and children, makes no sense. And so we find ourselves asking the question, “What went wrong?” What on God’s earth have we done to arrive at this situation?

The entire nation has observed the past few days of the 16 Days of Activism on Violence against Women and Children. In fact this is an international campaign, and we have been joined by millions the world over. And, this campaign has continued for many years now. And yet the senseless violence continues.

Now, I do not need to stand here today and remind us of the facts. That South African women and children experience some of the highest incidences of violence in the world, is not in dispute.

Due to the nature of the acts themselves and flawed reporting mechanisms, we have no way of knowing for certain how prevalent this problem is, but we can conservatively say that one in every four women in South Africa is a victim of domestic violence.

And none of the statistics make any sense at all. I, like each one of you, do not understand why we commit such senseless acts of violence on those whom we claim to love.

So what do we do next?

As South African men and women, many of our traditional and cultural values accept violence as a means of resolving conflict, and these values are critical in shaping and perpetuating the violent behaviour of men towards women. Violence against women is used as a way of securing and maintaining the relations of male dominance and female subordination that are central to our patriarchal social order.

So I turn now to all the men here today.

When you beat your wife or girlfriend or mother or girl child, do you feel like more of a man?

Are you more of a husband when your wife is almost dead?

Does your daughter love and respect you more for beating her – or abusing her?

When your mother sees what you do, is she proud of you, her son? You see – it just does not make sense.

The only act which makes any sense to me, and I am sure to you too, is to **stop** the violence. As men – we need to learn how to love again. We need to learn how to be real men – men who are not afraid to talk about their feelings, to show love and

compassion, and to take responsibility for ourselves, our families and the communities we live in. As men we need to start making sense of our own lives and making a real difference in the lives of those we love and care for.

And so I turn to each person standing here today.

And we ask the question together –

“What am I going to do to stop the violence?” Say it with me:

(Pause to get everyone on board)

“What am I going to do to stop the violence?”

Tonight your next door neighbour may well be a victim. What will you do? Someone in your street could be raped or abused, or even killed – what will you do? Will you do something to stop the violence? Will you ring the doorbell perhaps – or give them a ring on your cell phone? Will you do something, just to stop the violence?

For it is only when we decide to act, that we can hope to make a difference in the lives of others, who can no longer act for themselves. It is only when you, and I, ring the bell, make the call and intervene, that someone else will know some peace and love in their lives.

For Christians, we are in a time of Advent – that time of promise and hope which precedes Christmas. What hope and promise will you offer a woman or child this Christmas?

The only way that this gathering of people here today will make any sense, is if in one year's time, we do not have to gather here again. The only way that will happen is if every one of us, each one of you, and I, do everything we can to stop the violence, starting today. This makes all the sense in the world.

Please – ring the bell – stop the violence.

May God bless you.