



**Faith ACTION**  
to end Gender-Based Violence

# SUMMARY



## Executive Summary of the Draft Interfaith Statement of Commitment

**WE WILL  
SPEAK OUT**  **SA**  
FAITH COMMUNITIES ENDING SEXUAL AND  
GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE



In partnership with  
**Canada**



government  
communications  
Department:  
Government Communication and Information System  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



**We faith inspired servant leaders, scholars, activists, survivors, faith leaders and concerned citizens of South Africa** invite you to join us in a faith-rooted individual and shared Commitment to Action Campaign to end gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) in our beloved Country.

**We note** that President Ramaphosa acknowledged that GBVF has reached pandemic proportions and the National Strategic Plan on GBVF started in April 2020 refers to the critical role of the faith sector as part of the solution to “mobilise through faith, dignity, humanity, ubuntu, social justice and gender justice, harness their capacity as agents of social norm change”. In 2022 the faith community was called on “to establish shared ethical values founded on standards of mutual accountability within the faith-based sector and build its capacity to (i) support survivors of GBV against perpetrators; (ii) dismantle patriarchy from religious teachings and practices, whilst integrating more women into senior leadership roles; and (iii) strengthen spiritual healing and restorative justice, whilst eradicating all forms of spiritual abuse.”

**We join together inspired by our faith to pray, to speak out and mobilise people to action.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF SHORTCOMINGS

**We witness** the horrifying realities. According to crime statistics from April 2022- March 2023 there was an average of 118 rapes reported daily and 11 women murdered daily. Abuse against children and the vulnerable are also at pandemic levels. All the statistics do not reflect the true reality as so many crimes go unreported and the cost to human life, survivors, families, communities and the economy are immeasurable. Over 85% of South Africans profess a faith. This means that GBVF is a lived reality in our faith communities. **We agree** that this is not excusable and is contrary to all of our diverse sacred texts. We were created with equal dignity. **We admit** faith communities have not done enough to end this destruction and have sometimes, by our inaction (passivism), silence, misuse of religion consciously or unconsciously been complicit in contributing to the scourge of GBVF.

**We recognise that** we have contributed to the current crisis through our own woundedness as a result of our personal and communal traumas linked to the history of apartheid, colonial and patriarchal oppression and violence that robbed us all of dignity and self-respect. We cannot minimise the impact of these causes of trauma. They will continue to be pervasive until we recognize them and begin to actively confront structural violence and then begin to build new social structures that nurture peace.

**We understand** these ills are linked to our past, but we also take responsibility for the present. South Africa is characterised by a complex and multi-dimensional set of historic and current intersectional inequalities that result in it being one of the most unequal societies in the world. The legacy of apartheid has created a South African context where gender inequality intersects and compounds other forms of inequality in terms of socio-economic disadvantage, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, ethnicity and religion. To fulfill our mandate we call on truth, love and God’s mercy to restore our self-respect and dignity in order to offer the hope and healing needed. We are blessed to live in a democracy where we are now free to confront GBVF and interrogate the root causes of biases, toxic norms, stereotypes and structural inequalities.

## SHARED IDEALS

**We are a human family** that is diverse and unique, composed of many faith traditions that all share some core common values and truths. Some of these essential truths include:

- LOVE:** Showing empathy, understanding and care for all is the shared foundation of all faiths.
- ONENESS:** We are one species and we need each other to survive and thrive.
- EQUAL DIGNITY:** We are all God’s creation and have a shared right to fairness and **EQUITY**.
- PEACE: JUSTICE and MERCY** are the pillars to peace. These three enable restorative healing.

These shared hopes can be summed up by the South African philosophy of **UBUNTU**- a way of being that celebrates that all humans are deeply interconnected and that encourages **GENEROSITY** of spirit, enables **BELONGING** and **INCLUSIVITY**.

We strive to nurture mutual **RESPECT**, to act justly with **COMPASSION** and **HUMILITY**, and to speak **TRUTH** even when costly. **FAITH** is crucial and central in the way we understand the basic building blocks of our society. All forms of violence have no support or justification in our shared faith values. We understand that religious ideals and prayer are inadequate alone. We now commit to translating our faith into action.

## COMMITMENT TO ACTION

**We jointly and personally commit to the following plan of action:**

1. **We will now be vocal** without fear of causing division or offending the powerful because we understand this **silence enables violence** to continue.
2. **We commit to amplifying** religious texts that promote ideals of dignity, gender equality and justice and engage with interpretations of texts that have been used to support patriarchy, violence and dehumanisation based on race, gender or ability.
3. **We will nurture men and dismantle** toxic masculinity by normalising the expression of healthy emotion, supporting everyone’s feelings and vulnerabilities. We know that validation is essential to avoiding explosions of anger that cause irreparable violence to self and society.
4. **We will promote care-giving** environments in schools and in diverse family settings.
5. **We will prioritise the protection** of vulnerable groups including women, children, people with disabilities, LGBTIQ+, and men. We will stop protecting perpetrators and stigmatising those who report. This is secondary abuse.
6. **We will act decisively** and systematically against perpetrators including religious leaders and stop asking survivors to be patient and forcing forgiveness. We demand accountability.
7. **We commit to overcoming** our prejudices and inaction. Ignoring poverty, racism, substance abuse and mental health problems has hindered prevention and contributed to GBVF for too long. It is enough.
8. **We will support and increase** efforts to offer healing service and ministries to the traumatised, dispossessed and bereaved who have suffered from GBVF.
9. **We will create** an enabling environment for people to speak and act for themselves. We will listen to survivors, to women and the marginalised, involve men and boys as part of the solution while also calling out behaviours and attitudes that demean women’s dignity, condone violence or stigmatise. We will stay open to participatory programme planning and research processes ensuring accountability to those vulnerable to abuse.



**10. We will support** faith leaders who are speaking out and acting and will work alongside one another by speaking out when we encounter violence in private and public spaces. We will contribute to public forums and media spaces on equality and justice based on sacred text so that religion is increasingly associated with justice, gender equality, inclusion and non-violence.

**11. We will ensure** adequate resources are allocated to reflect that we prioritise transformative action and are able to equip ourselves and our faith communities to make a decisive difference.

**12. We will collaborate** with each other. We will communicate, consult and share prevention programmes, leadership training, counseling services and resources across faith communities, Government, NGOs, the private sector and groups in a spirit of unity. We are ready to learn from one another, improve our practices and support diverse initiatives as part of a whole-society approach to healing and building a healthy and safe community. It is only by working together that we can establish sustainable peace and economic stability at every level of society.

Finally, we remain steadfast in the promise of a true democracy and in the spirit of unity and the need for contextually-appropriate action, we commit to continuing to build a **united and active interfaith collective for mutual support and to hold one another accountable**. To translate our hopes and ideals into decisive action through proactive policy development **we will:**

- a. **Set up accountability mechanisms.** We will develop and review gender and safeguarding policies in our faith groups and establish a joint policy to guide our collective work.
- b. **Establish justice desks** led by combined teams of women, men, youth and children in faith sectors to engage survivors and perpetrators, shape responses, provide meaningful support structures for healing and accompaniment as well as structures that have a mandate to put in place effective sanctions as needed. This will help us break the intergenerational trauma that has led to the ongoing cycles of violence.
- c. **Actively encourage women's participation in leadership and decision-making processes.** As equals we can better consult, find solutions and form policies beneficial to all.
- d. **Address any reported incidents** of GBVF in our faith communities in accordance with the relevant policies with respect and without any attempt to silence those reporting.
- e. **Create joint learning platforms** to re-examine our use of our sacred texts and our religious practices, and developing more appropriate theological approaches in the current context;
- f. **Document our work and report on progress** using storytelling and building a shared evidence base.
- g. **Open safe and courageous spaces** to reflect on our work together, learn from mistakes and improve our impact.

*We believe that through our shared hopes and ideals, by acknowledging our shortcomings and committing to this decisive course of action, we can establish **UBUNTU in our Rainbow Nation** and transform into a **CULTURE OF PEACE**. You are invited to join this Campaign and add your name and commitment to this individual and joint Statement to Action to End GBVF in South Africa.*

<https://www.wwsosa.org.za/interfaith-action-to-end-gbv-statement-and-campaign/>  
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<sup>1</sup>As a key stakeholder in the national strategic plan on GBV and femicide, we are guided by a key set of faith sector resolutions agreed at the November 2022 National Summit: "to establish shared ethical values founded on standards for mutual accountability within the faith-based sector and build its capacity to (i) support survivors of GBV against perpetrators; (ii) dismantle patriarchy from religious teachings and practices, whilst integrating more women into senior leadership roles; and (iii) strengthen spiritual healing and restorative justice, whilst eradicating all forms of spiritual abuse." (NSP Summit Resolutions, pages 5 and 7)