

**MEDIA STATEMENT**  
**TEKANO: International Human Rights Day 2021**  
**25 years of promises, it's time for action.**

**Attention: Eds**  
**9 December 2021**

Today marks 25 years since President Nelson Mandela signed the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa into law, in Sharpeville, on 10 December 1996.

While the South African Constitution has irrevocably transformed the legal landscape, Tekano, as an organisation situated at the intersections of health and social justice, is keenly aware of the inequality and the crises of poverty, unemployment, and deeply entrenched racial divides, that make the promises of the Constitution a dream for the majority of South Africans.

As we join the international community in recognising International Human Rights Day and the official signing of the Constitution, which sets our democracy apart from the brutality and inequality of Apartheid, it is important to recognise that the society we live in today is one grounded in the universal principles of human rights.

Our Constitution recognises women's rights as human rights and enshrines the right to health. It also recognises the rights of queer persons. However, there is an underground war against women, children, queer and trans bodies. Black lesbians and transgender people in South African townships and rural areas continue to face an overwhelming climate of discrimination and violence, despite protections promised them in the country's constitution.

The pandemic of violence against women and children in South Africa is one of the biggest structural obstacles in the attainment of health and well-being for women, children and other vulnerable groups. The pandemic of VAWG is also a critical barrier to the enjoyment of the rights enshrined in the Constitution.

"We should continue to pursue raising awareness of the systemic causes of injustice and socio-economic inequities and inequalities for women, children, the LGBTIQ+ populations, but a human rights-based approach needs to be pushed further in the quest for seeking to promote the transformative power of collective social change," says Lance Louskieter, a Tekano Lifelong Fellow.

Bayanda Ndumiso, a Tekano Lifelong Fellow, says: "The reality is that I am not safe anywhere. I constantly have to look over my shoulder, because I do not meet the social or community standards of how a boy or a man must be or act. I've only recently realised how much of my identity I have had to put aside as a product of the fear that my external environment provokes."

Recent crime statistics included specific references to 'farm murders', but fail to reflect statistics of crimes committed against women, children, and other vulnerable people, including farm workers denied basic human rights.

"My mother was bitten by a farmer's dog on a neighbouring farm. She lost her ear, had to shave her head because she had so many holes in her head, and had to have skin grafts," says Chaleen Arendse, of the Women on Farms Project and a Tekano Life-Long Fellow, who was born and raised on a state-farm outside Stellenbosch.

"To reach the main road and to access services, we had to cross a farmer's land. My mother was bitten by several dogs, but nothing happened to the farmer," adds Arendse, who today works with Women on Farms to advocate for farm-workers' rights.

"Why should children on farms travel so far to reach a library? Access to information is a human right," says Arendse.

"The 'land' question too, is fundamentally a 'gender' question. Human rights are inextricable rights. As we celebrate 25 years of our Constitution, Tekano calls on Justice Minister Ronald Lamola to address the ongoing violations of the fundamental human rights of women and girls on farms," says Tekano Chief Executive, Lebo Ramafoko.

"An equitable society is one in which justice has been served – and justice is served when health disparities are not entrenched by structural social advantage or disadvantage. It's time for us to broaden the debate on human rights and to begin to make the promises signed into law by President Mandela 25 years ago a reality," adds Ms Ramafoko.

**ENDS/**

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