

MEDIA STATEMENT

TEKANO SAYS PREDATORY MALE BEHAVIOUR THREATENS THE FIGHT AGAINST HIV

Attention: Eds

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As the world recognises World Aids Day on 1 December 2021, forty years after the first AIDS cases were reported, much has changed in the world and South Africa has indeed made great progress in tackling the HIV pandemic.

“South Africa has made huge strides in the fight against HIV. All of our aspirations are captured within the National strategic plan which lays out how we are responding to HIV, AIDS and tuberculosis,” says Patrick Mdletshe a Lifelong Fellow at Tekano and national deputy chairperson of the Treatment Action Campaign (TAC) and Head of the CAPRISA Community Programme.

While much progress has been made, structural inequalities – which have worsened in the decades since SA’s widespread prevention campaigns began in the early 1990s – continue to obstruct HIV prevention and treatment efforts.

Tekano, as an organisation situated at the intersections of health and social justice, is keenly aware of the ways in which the COVID19 pandemic – and the nation-wide lockdown – exacerbated existing inequality, as well as the crises of poverty, unemployment, and deeply-entrenched racial divides. And that the pandemic has widened existing socio-economic inequalities and has subjected those already vulnerable – women, children, people with disabilities, gender-non-conforming individuals – to further victimisation and economic disempowerment.

And that the pandemic would, inevitably, have an impact on the sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing of women and girls, and drive sexually transmitted infections, including HIV.

The crime statistics released by Police Minister Cele on 21 November 2021, have vindicated the worst – but not entirely unexpected fears – of those of us who work for social justice and for whom ‘health’ is much more than being ‘the absence of disease’, but the total economic, social, environmental wellbeing of individuals.

The rape statistics and the high rates of child rape, which leads to children getting pregnant, are cause for national concern. While we have managed to put 6.4 million HIV positive people on ARTs, treatment without concerted efforts to prevent new infections - including preventing the rape of women and girls - will be to no avail.

13 000 of the 73 000 cases of assault reported between July and September were domestic-related and the rate of child murders has climbed by nearly a third. These statistics illustrate that South Africa is not doing enough to help women, especially young women and children, to prevent HIV infection.

How do we claim success when 10- to 14-year-olds are giving birth to children? Why is there no uproar and why are we not seeing all perpetrators of child-rape brought to book and made to account? What silences us? What enables us to call it “teenage pregnancy” and not “predatory male behaviour” that is putting the children of South Africa at risk?

The pandemic of violence against women and children in South Africa is one of the biggest structural obstacle in the attainment of health and well-being for women, children and other vulnerable groups; and in the country’s efforts to combat the spread of HIV.

“Health and justice are inter-related, inter-dependent, and indivisible human rights,” 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.

“The current scourge of violence against women and girls and other vulnerable groups, coupled with rising inequalities amongst key and vulnerable population groups, and the impact of the global pandemic, bring a renewed sense of urgency to address the entrenched structural and socio-economic inequalities driving HIV, including the wide-spread male predation driving GBV and HIV infections,” added Ms Ramafoko.

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For more info or media interviews, please call **Bongani Maseko** on **061 545 9425**
www.tekano.org.za