

Reflections on the prevention of violence against children

Ms Bathabile Dlamini, MP

Minister of Social Development

It is with pleasure that I submit my contribution to the 2014 *South African Child Gauge*, a valuable publication that gives a detailed account of the status of children in our country. The publication of this report comes at an opportune time as we celebrate 20 years of freedom and democracy in South Africa.

The celebration of this significant milestone will not be complete without us taking a collective reflection on the progress we have made in protecting our children. The *Child Gauge 2014* gives us a unique opportunity to consider the breadth and depth of actions taken by the many contributors to this effort, and also to begin to document the areas of common endeavour that will translate the promise of a better life, including child protection especially for many vulnerable children in South Africa, into a living reality.

Twenty years ago, under the leadership of our first democratically elected President, Mr Nelson Mandela, we set about creating a caring society and a South Africa fit for children. This commitment is reflected in a number of progressive pieces of legislation that our ANC government ratified since coming into office. The achievements of our government as reflected in the *Twenty Year Review* report reflect our enduring commitment to achieving this goal, and also highlight the remarkable progress we have made since the dawn of democracy.

Through government's pro-poor policies and programmes such as school nutrition, social assistance, no-fee schools and other initiatives, we have witnessed improvement in girls' enrolment and attendance in school and also increased access to basic services at the household level, resulting in positive outcomes for children and families.

Despite this remarkable progress, much more still needs to be done to address high levels of violence against women and children. The urgency of addressing this issue is underlined by the recent spate of terrible violence and sexual offences against children in Gauteng province and other parts of our country. This violence – unjustifiable and largely preventable – is a major barrier to the full realisation of the human rights of children as enshrined in our Constitution.

It is against this background that, in 2012, Cabinet established the Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) made up of the Ministers



of Social Development; Justice and Correctional Services; Women; Home Affairs; Police; and Basic Education to look into the root causes of violence against women and children.

The membership of this committee clearly shows that protecting children is a shared societal responsibility that cannot be left to government alone. For this reason, the Integrated Programme of Action (POA) for 2013–2017 highlights the need to work together across government and with all sectors of our society to prevent and respond to violence against children. The POA is a five-year plan which underlines our national effort to put the safety, health and well-being of children

at the centre of government's work. It represents an integrated approach to protecting children and drives new partnerships in achieving a common goal. Furthermore, the POA notes the need to pay special attention to cross-cutting strategies aimed at promoting and protecting the rights of children with disabilities. Social Development, as a lead government department and a key member of the Justice, Crime Prevention and Security Cluster, will co-ordinate the implementation of the POA in collaboration with all stakeholders.

The proposed interventions and programmes in the POA outline an extensive range of existing and new measures that are aimed at stepping up our national efforts to combat violence against children. One such initiative is the annual national Child Protection Week campaign, which provides a key platform for accelerating violence prevention and response efforts at all levels of our society.

For over 20 years we have been running an annual multimedia Child Protection Week campaign to increase awareness and understanding of the importance of primary prevention to reduce child abuse, neglect and exploitation in South Africa. The main aim of the campaign is to embed primary prevention by supporting the work of community-based organisations and other initiatives to act on the core message, "protecting children is everyone's business".

I have no doubt that, if we mobilise and empower communities to take action at local level, we will succeed in bringing a solution to one of the most intractable challenges of our times – violence against women and children.

Working together, I am confident that we can, indeed, ensure that all children in South Africa are and feel safe.