

What About the Women?

The 2016 State of the Nation Address (SONA) yielded no surprises when President Zuma failed to single out South African women as a vulnerable group, much less present reforms constructed to address injustices against women.

The SONA is meant to set out the government's key policy objectives and deliverables for the year ahead, which is the basis for executive action during that calendar year. These objectives inform budget allocation and service delivery and they should affect the realization of women's rights and impact on their social and economic position.

President Jacob Zuma's 2016 SONA was clearly aimed at calming investors and government supporters as it focussed on the economy, cost savings and other monetary reforms. Glaringly missing was any attention to the women of the nation, beside the acknowledgement of the 60th anniversary of the 1956 Women's March on Pretoria, a general statement on increased life span and the encouragement of big business to partner with women and youth.

Women and girls make up almost 52% of the South African populace, but after 22 years of democracy and the most inclusive constitution in the world, equality in treatment, services, and employment is yet to be achieved for this sector of the population. Economic transformation is undoubtedly a priority for our government but SONA 2016 did nothing specific to address the poverty of women. Women are the most overburdened and encumbered in our nation and they bear the brunt of inequality in SA. Our women remain unemployed, poverty stricken and landless. This is the state of our nation.

One of SA's most shaming social ills is the high rate of violations against women, so much so that we have an annual period of awareness called 16 Days of Activism For No Violence Against Women and Children. Yet violence against women remains prevalent in our society and dominates our headlines and our courts. This is the state of our nation.

No indication was given on the improvement on service levels in the of our public services e.g. health, welfare, justice, education etc. It is where women are severely maltreated and discriminated against on a daily basis. This is the state of our nation.

The repeated failure by government to specifically focus on the needs of women and girls ultimately results in the indirect, and sometimes direct, prioritisation of men in all government efforts aimed at improving the lives of all who live in South Africa. Government must continue to be held accountable for its failure to bring about substantive equality for women and girls through its policies and activities. Gender-blindness cannot be tolerated any longer.

That should be the State of our Nation.

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