

MEDIA STATEMENT

MINISTER LINDIWE ZULU CONDEMNS VIOLENT CRIMES AGAINST OLDER PERSONS AND CALLS THE PUBLIC TO PROTECT THEM AGAINST THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

Pretoria, 15 June 2020: On the occasion of the World Elder Abuse Awareness Day, which is commemorated annually across the globe on this day, the Minister of Social Development Ms Lindiwe Zulu condemns violent crimes against older persons and calls on members of the public to care and protect them against the brutal attacks and the spread of COVID-19 pandemic. Older persons are at a significantly increased risk of severe diseases and from the virus.

This year's World Elder Abuse Awareness Day is commemorated under the theme: "listening to the voices of older persons amid the coronavirus pandemic". In South Africa, this day comes in the wake of a recent surge in cases of gender-based violence reported during the lockdown period. It also comes in the wake of a brutal rape and murder of a 75-year old woman in Sweetwaters, KwaZulu-Natal by criminals who pretended to be law enforcement agents and the barbaric double murder of a 91-year old man and 85-year old woman in Lusikisiki, Eastern Cape.

"At a time when our senior citizens are concerned about their health and safety due to the COVID-19 pandemic, criminals are taking advantage to attack the most vulnerable who cannot even defend themselves. What kind of society are we that abuses, instead of cherishing our senior citizens? We strongly condemn any form of violence against senior citizens in our country, and we urge our law enforcement agencies to bring the perpetrators of these senseless acts of utter barbarism to face the full might of the law", said Minister Zulu.

The United Nations General Assembly adopted resolution 66/127 which designated the 15th of June as World Elder Abuse Awareness Day to support the rights of older persons to a dignified life free of violence and abuse. Elder abuse is a global phenomenon that takes many forms including physical, emotional, sexual and financial abuse. Older persons are particularly vulnerable to these forms of abuse as they are unable to defend themselves. Research shows that age, gender and dependency increases the risk of abuse, with women suffering the most. What is more concerning is that some of these abuses are perpetrated by close family members and institutions that are meant to care and protect them. Minister Zulu expressed concern about implications for older persons as confirmed positive cases of the coronavirus continue to increase in South Africa.

"Over the last few days, we have witnessed widespread community transmission of the virus in many parts of our country, with confirmed cases now surpassing 60 thousand and over one thousand reported deaths. We know that over 63 percent of the reported deaths occur in those aged 60 and above. While we emphasise that everyone is at risk of contracting the virus, our senior citizens are at greater risk of infection due to ageing, decreased immune and comorbidities. This pandemic threatens to reverse the significant gains we have recorded in improving life expectancy in our country. We therefore need to act in solidarity with them by preventing the community transmission to this vulnerable group by giving them love, care and support and ensuring that they are protected against infection at all times", said Minister Zulu.

Some residential facilities in the Eastern Cape, KwaZulu-Natal and Western Cape have reported coronavirus infections and deaths. The total number of deaths reported so far is 27, with 127 confirmed positive cases among older persons. As of today, the total number of reported confirmed cases among support staff, including nurses is 221.

As part of its ongoing national effort to protect and promote the human rights of older persons, particularly in the context of COVID-19 pandemic, the Department has temporarily suspended all external visits to residential facilities across the country and prioritised the training of nurses and support staff. To date, 199 nurses were trained to conduct screening and testing within the residential care facilities. The Department is also working jointly with the Department of Health to roll out flu vaccinations for older persons, ensure that all facilities are provided with personal protective equipment and are monitored for compliance with all the precautionary measures to contain the further spread of the virus.

The Department currently funds 418 residential facilities that provide care and support for older persons through provinces. An amount of R 1, 75 million has been set aside to assist residential facilities to prevent and contain the spread of the virus.

The Department of Health and the National Institute of Communicable Diseases (NICD) will conduct surveillance of COVID-19 cases at residential facilities for older persons.

In addition, the Department has partnered with NICDAM and First National Bank targeting to train and capacitate 89 resource constrained residential facilities on infection control, health and safety guidelines and palliative care, amongst others. All these measures are aimed at preventing the spread of COVID-19 and protecting older persons in residential facilities as they are at an increased risk of severe illness. With regard to income support, the South African Social Security Agency (SASSA) currently pays old age grant to over 3 million persons aged 60 years and above on a monthly basis. The recipients of old age grant received a top-up of R250 as part of government's socio-economic measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on the poor and most vulnerable. To comply with the disaster management regulations, SASSA has staggered the payment of social grants, with priority given to older persons and persons with disabilities.

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