

## Media statement

### THE DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT CALLS FOR COLLABORATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN MARITIME SECTOR

Cape Town, 25 November 2022, On the occasion of the inaugural Seminar on Gender Based Violence led by the South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), the department of social development called for accountability on the many cases of sexual violence and harassment that go unreported at sea in the Maritime Industry. Represented by the Chief Director: Victim Empowerment, Social Crime and Substance Abuse Ms. Siza Magangoe, the department has been making inroads to work with the transport sector to prevent sexual violence and exploitation of women in this sector.

The South African Maritime Safety Authority (SAMSA), is the country's maritime sector that is a backbone for International trade through shipping transport and is a critical economic sector in which thousands of people of all genders work. SAMSA is a state agency under the Department of Transport and led the initiative with stakeholders from the World Maritime University, Social Development and Maritime Academic and Female Seafarer.

According to research conducted by Professor Momoko Kitada of the World Marine University (WMU), this sector has not been free of criticism, with a number of aggravating factors pointing to sexual harassment that happens onboard different ships, male-dominated environment and enforcement of laws and policies that are weakened by different geographical jurisdiction upon which acts of gender-based violence and harassment may be committed.

The findings of the research showed that there are only 1.28% females in the sea and 60% of these women report encountering gender-based discrimination onboard. In addition, 25% reported that in the shipping sector, physical and sexual harassment is a common occurrence. Some of the violence experienced at sea include discrimination, harassment, bullying, intimidation, fixed mindset derived from toxic masculinity and body-shaming.

The research report concluded that legislation must be complemented by frameworks and platforms to promote gender equality.

Speaking at the Seminar, Ms. Magangoe reminded the audience how fitting it was for the session to be held on when South Africa observes 16 days of Activism for no violence against women and children and on the heels of the second Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF). The Presidential Summit on Gender-Based Violence and Femicide took place earlier in November, where the government worked together with civil society organisations, in line with the implementation of National Strategic Plan on gender based violence and femicide. The department of social development leads Pillar 4 of the NSP which focuses on the provision and strengthening of an integrated community and institutional response, care, support and healing to GBVF survivors and their families.

The SAMSA seminar on GBV revealed harrowing and upsetting tales of abuse that are often perpetrated by well-respected seniors in positions of power. Jabulile Nkedama\*\* A current Seafarer, relayed her personal trauma of being violated at sea. She told her story of rape where a Senior Fearer and Supervisor violated her while she was incapacitated from having taken flu medication. "There was no one to conduct a medical check-up and therefore, the diagnosis of rape remains inconclusive. The issue with GBV at sea is the need to bridge the jurisdiction gap between the sea and land by making it easier for people at sea to report sexual violation cases. Men who are often perceived as captains and heroes at sea, may actually be other people's worst nightmares and they yield all the power with no consequences".

"There are a lot of untold stories and many people suffering by themselves."

She said many people want to share their experiences but are scared of being victimized. People don't report cases because they do not want to be known as the "face of rape".

"Perpetrators or offenders are seldom profiled and humiliated by being put in front pages of newspapers", said Lesego Mdeni\* a current Seafarer.

"GBV does not only happen to females. There is the LGBTQTI+ community at sea and they are tormented on board. There are no policies to deal with the harassment. It is very hard for them to take further steps. Even if they report, the only people they can report to are the very same perpetrators" revealed Asanda Mnguni\* a Cadet at sea.

Tshedi Zulu\*, a Marine Pilot, relayed a traumatic incident that happened to a colleague at sea. She said that a young man was gang-raped on a vessel. "Bearing in mind that onboard Performance Appraisals require sign off in order to ensure a re-appointment. As an Ordinary Seaman (apprentice), he could not report the rape because of fear of being dismissed and fear of his rape being associated with being called gay".

She told the audience that the apprentice locked himself in his cabin for three days without eating. He eventually disappeared within the system and was never heard from since the horrific encounter.

Speakers not only shared their views about the challenges they faced in various work environments because of their gender (as the Maritime sphere was traditionally, and still is, a male-dominated industry), but also how they excelled in their respective careers despite the many hindrances obstructing their growth. Biases towards women in the maritime industry are still the major barrier for gender equality in shipping and ports.

The Deputy Minister of Transport, Ms. Sindisiwe Lydia Chikunga who represented government said that South Africa is still haunted by the death of the cadet Ms. Akhona Geveza whose lifeless body was found off the coast of Croatia on 24 June 2010, after having reported a case of sexual harassment. "It is a case that devastated not only the family but the maritime industry in its entirety and had many young women questioning if this was a career for them."

In the minds of many South African seafarers the case remains unsolved as her death was declared a suicide. “This is not meant to open old wounds to the family,” said the Deputy Minister Chikunga.

This horrific incident was widely reported in the country by the media houses with many young men and women coming forward with their own stories of sexual harassment at the hands of senior officers on board. This incident and the other related cases of sexual harassment that were reported at the time threatened the country’s ambitions of being a key player in the Maritime industry and promotion of the Maritime industry including gender parity. Mechanisms for crime prevention and reporting ought to be strengthened for this sector, concluded the Deputy Minister Chikunga.

Ms. Magangoe conveyed similar sentiments and said that in the same manner that HIV/AIDS was destigmatized, we need to raise the profile of GBV, talk about it and remove the shame associated with reporting cases of violation. “We must make those who make those who violate feel uncomfortable. The victim must be at the centre of justice and should be able to access state support with ease”. Ms. Magangoe imparted the various access points and services available to victims and that Government is working on collecting victim support data to create a National picture and information sharing amongst its entities for better and effective service delivery. She further highlighted the victim support legislation that the DSD is leading namely, Children’s Act to Strengthen Child Protection, the Older Persons’ Act to protect elders from Violence and Victim Service Bill which are crucial to the NSP Pillar 4 of providing response, care and support that will enable healing to victims and survivors of Gender Based Violence.

Ms. Magangoe called for accountability for the many cases that are reported and remain unresolved. She said SAMSA should be guided to institute a Subcommittee that will hold everyone in the Maritime sector accountable and form part of existing Sectoral approach and collaboration in the fight against GBV.

The department of social development calls for victims of GBVF to use its 24-hour Gender Based Violence Command Centre to report all forms of violence on 0800 428 428 or dial \*120\*7867#

ISSUED BY THE NATIONAL DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Media enquiries may be directed to Ms Lumka Oliphant on 083 484 8067 or [lumkao@dsd.gov.za](mailto:lumkao@dsd.gov.za)