

MEDIA STATEMENT
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GBVF IS A NATIONAL DISASTER. WOMEN'S FREEDOM CANNOT BE THE PRICE OF THEIR SAFETY.

POWA responds to the deaths of five women in the Kempton Park and Olifantsfontein area and asks: What has materially changed for women?

JOHANNESBURG — People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) expresses its deep sadness at the deaths of five women whose bodies have been discovered in and around Kempton Park and Olifantsfontein over approximately two months.

We extend our sincere condolences to their families, friends and loved ones. We acknowledge the lives that have been lost and the grief of families who are mourning while also waiting for answers.

Among the women was 38-year-old Elizabeth “Tsontso” Moselakgomo, whose family formally identified her after she disappeared while out running in Rhodesfield, Kempton Park. We remember her, as we remember the other women whose identities may not yet be publicly known, with dignity and respect.

POWA recognises that these are active police investigations. SAPS has indicated that it is premature to conclude that the cases are connected. The evidence must determine the circumstances surrounding each death and whether any connection exists between them.

POWA is equally mindful that the circumstances and motives in each of these deaths have not yet been established. We should not pre-empt those investigations. But these deaths are occurring in a country already confronting an acknowledged national disaster of gender-based violence and femicide, and in communities where the discovery of five women's bodies within a relatively short period is understandably causing serious concern.

This cannot be treated as ordinary. It demands urgency from the criminal justice system and a response that matches the seriousness of what is unfolding.

Women should be able to run, walk, work, travel and move through their communities without calculating whether exercising an ordinary freedom could cost them their lives. When women begin changing how they live because they fear what may happen to them, we are no longer talking only about individual safety — we are talking about women's freedom.

GBVF HAS ALREADY BEEN CLASSIFIED AS A NATIONAL DISASTER

In November 2025, South Africa formally classified Gender-Based Violence and Femicide as a national disaster, recognising the persistent and immediate threat it poses to life.

Ten months later, POWA believes South Africa must confront a simple question: What has materially changed for women?

The classification acknowledged the scale of the crisis. But acknowledgement must be translated into action.

A national disaster demands urgency, coordination, resources and accountability. These must be visible in prevention, policing, investigations, prosecution, safer communities, and properly resourced services for women experiencing violence.

Most importantly, progress cannot be measured only by what happens after a woman is attacked or killed. We must also measure it by what we do to prevent violence in the first place. Our response cannot begin only when a woman's body is found.

MANAGING WOMEN'S SAFETY CANNOT BE THE DISASTER-MANAGEMENT PLAN

Too often, when women are threatened by violence, the response begins with instructions to women: do not walk alone, do not run alone, avoid certain places, share your location, remain vigilant.

There are circumstances in which immediate safety advice is necessary, and POWA would never discourage women from taking reasonable precautions where a particular threat exists. But precautions cannot become policy. The burden of mitigating the risk of violence cannot continue to fall on women.

Women are already watching where they walk, where they park, who is behind them, what time it is and whether they will get home safely.

Women are watching everything. The question is: who is watching the perpetrators?

We cannot continue responding to violence by progressively restricting the lives of those at risk of experiencing it. Responsibility for violence lies with those who perpetrate it. The State and its institutions have a corresponding responsibility to prevent violence, protect people, investigate crime and ensure accountability.

Prevention must therefore also mean shifting our attention from endlessly modifying women's behaviour to identifying, disrupting and holding accountable those who perpetrate violence.

When women must change where they go, when they exercise, how they travel and how they participate in public life because of the threat of violence, the consequence extends beyond fear. It becomes a restriction on women's freedom.

Women have the right to walk. To run. To work. To travel. To occupy public spaces. To live ordinary lives without constantly calculating the risk of violence. Women should not have to become less free to stay alive.

For POWA, this is not an abstract debate. Since 1979, we have worked alongside women affected by violence and abuse. Our current frontline footprint includes Victim Friendly Rooms at Kempton Park and Olifantsfontein police stations, among others.

That experience has reinforced a fundamental truth: responding effectively when violence occurs is essential, but response alone is not prevention.

Prevention means acting before another woman is harmed or killed. It requires institutions that function, effective investigations, consequences for perpetrators, safer public spaces and communities, and confronting the attitudes, behaviours and inequalities that continue to enable violence against women.

A credible national response must also ensure that the frontline services women depend on — including counselling, shelter and legal assistance — are adequately and sustainably resourced.

POWA calls for each of these five deaths to be investigated thoroughly and urgently. Whether the cases are connected must be determined by evidence. Regardless of that outcome, every woman deserves the same determination to establish what happened to her and to hold those responsible accountable.

Their families deserve answers, dignity and appropriate communication as investigations progress. But South Africa must demand more than answers after women have died.

POWA Executive Director Fatima Shaik said:

“Behind the number five are five women whose lives mattered, and five families whose worlds have been changed forever.

But we must ask ourselves a deeply uncomfortable question: how many dead women will it take before South Africa stops treating this as normal?

We cannot keep counting women’s bodies, expressing outrage, issuing condolences and then moving on until another woman is killed.

GBVF has already been classified as a national disaster. Women should not have to die to prove that the disaster is real.

We have named the crisis. We have classified it. Now the country must answer for what changes because of it.

We refuse to accept a South Africa in which staying alive requires women to surrender their freedom. Women are not asking for permission to survive. We are demanding the right to live — freely, fully and without fear.”

ENDS

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About POWA

People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) is a women’s rights organisation established in 1979. POWA provides counselling, shelter, legal support, skills development, public education and advocacy aimed at ending violence against women and advancing women’s rights.