



## PRESS RELEASE

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### NEW INITIATIVE URGES GOVERNMENT TO STEP UP ACTION AGAINST DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

***In a project being launched today, Enhancing State Responsiveness to Gender-Based Violence: Paying the True Costs, the National Shelter Movement (NSM) of South Africa joins forces with the Heinrich Böll Foundation (HBF) Southern Africa to keep the spotlight squarely focused on domestic violence in South Africa and how government interventions meet the diverse needs of survivors. Funded by the European Union (EU), this three-year project will research and analyse the need for domestic violence sheltering services in South Africa, with a specific focus on the factors impacting the rehabilitation of survivors. These findings will be used to engage key decision makers and forge alliances with government, public sector institutions and civil society partners, to further drive the cause for gender equality (through victim empowerment).***

Today Ambassador Marcus Cornaro, Head of the EU Delegation to South Africa, and Ms Tsholofelo Moloi, Director of the Victim Empowerment Programme at the National Department of Social Development (DSD), share the platform to speak about the issues of funding and state support, shelter accessibility and the (immediate and long-term) value of shelters.

Claudia Lopes, the EU Project Manager at the Heinrich Boell Foundation, notes that "The EU's continued support of the work on shelters and of the HBF, and the NSM, is testament to their determination to address gender-based violence in South Africa – a key issue affecting the rights of many women in our country. The presence of the Ambassador Cornaro attests to this."

Zubeda Dangor who heads the Executive of the NSM, says that she is encouraged by Director Tsholofelo Moloi's participation and emphasises that this is important in building relations between civil society and government. Dangor expressed the hope that the project being launched would strengthen the NSM's relationship with the Department of Social Development. Notably the Victim Empowerment Programme, primarily led by the department, is responsible for shelter services in South Africa.

Today's launch will introduce the project and what it expects to achieve to a range of stakeholders including Members of Parliament, Members of the Western Cape Legislature, parliamentary researchers, representatives from the Chapter 9 institutions, from government departments, civil society organisations and academia. The forum will also create a space to discuss how collaboration can be enhanced over the course of the project.

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## Background:

Shelters present an opportunity, not only for protection, but for the chance of a better life for survivors of abuse. The general profile of the average woman accessing shelters for abused women indicates that she has low levels of education, is unemployed and has no access to income. In addition to this, she has multiple health conditions and requires significant practical, medical and legal support. From this, it is clear that shelters need to provide much more than just protection from abuse.

The Domestic Violence Act requires the South African Police Service to assist victims of domestic violence by referring and transferring women (and their children) to shelters. However, funding for these shelters, affects availability and also the services they are able to offer.

An example of a dramatic success story is of a young woman who, after having suffered repeated rapes by a neighbour – which left her traumatised, pregnant and destitute – was able to overcome her situation through the support of a shelter. Her need for shelter assistance was identified through a partnership initiative between government, a private institution and a civil society organisation in 2012. Even though she dropped out of school after falling pregnant at the age of 17, the shelter provided her with the support she needed in order to complete her studies in social work. She now works as a social worker at the shelter where she stayed and is able to take care of herself and her child. She is also a motivational speaker, sharing her story to encourage others. Her impact is evident in a shelter that was opened in her honour. Stories like this present a great case to support the value shelters bring to survivors of gender-based violence (GBV) and to society as a whole.

The project being launched reflects on the enormous responsibility on national government to provide shelter to victims of abuse and to provide adequate and effective domestic violence survivor support programmes, specifically those associated with the provision of shelter for abused women. According to the Victim Empowerment Programme (VEP), shelter interventions must do more than merely meet the basic needs of women and their children, but must also provide support, counselling and skills development.

EU Project Manager at the Heinrich Boell Foundation (HBS), Claudia Lopes, says "***Enhancing State Responsiveness to Gender-Based Violence: Paying the True Costs*** will address the need to strengthen policy so that state responses to sheltering services in respect to funding, to inter- and multi-departmental cooperation are improved".

The project also aims to strengthen shelter referral systems and policies so that more survivors of domestic violence can have access to shelters, as well as improve the shelters themselves (through capacity building and training) to enhance their level of service delivery.

***Enhancing State Responsiveness to Gender-Based Violence: Paying the True Costs*** was inspired by the success of an earlier project which focused on shelters for abused women in the Western Cape and Gauteng (funded by the EU and implemented by the HBS and the Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre, 2011-13). Research and further engagement between the HBS and the NSM clearly identified the shortfalls in the system and the need for this project.

Shelters in the Western Cape welcome the project, with the Director of St. Anne's Homes, Joy Lange, confirming that the previous EU-funded study on shelters for abused women in the Western Cape was a game changer and significantly contributed to the positive changes in funding and support from the province's Department of Social Development.

See:

[https://za.boell.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Policybrief\\_reports\\_sheltershousingabusedwomen\\_upd](https://za.boell.org/sites/default/files/downloads/Policybrief_reports_sheltershousingabusedwomen_upd) for information about previous shelter studies.