FOCUS ON KWAZULU NATAL

16 days of activism – the Kwazulu Natal effort

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The South African Chapter of the International Association of Women Judges (IAWJ) was launched in August 2004. One of its aims was to initiate and/or become involved in community outreach efforts in order to, inter alia, raise the profile of the Justice System as well as awareness that the Judiciary is concerned about and active in community affairs. With this in mind, the IAWJ resolved to join with other organisations to strengthen their initiatives during the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender Violence and Child Abuse, from 25 November to 10 December 2004. Various activities, programmes and workshops were held in KwaZulu Natal during the 16 days and the IAWJ decided on 1 December 2004 (World Aids Day) to hold its various activities and to highlight the link between gender-based violence/child abuse and HIV/AIDS. The IAWJ joined with various NGOs ad CBOs and other institutions to make the day a memorable for all who were present at numerous Court Centres throughout the Province.

The normally austere and solemn High Courts in Durban and Pietermaritzburg as well as the various Magistrates’ Courts were transformed almost beyond recognition. Large banners sponsored by members of the legal profession and other institutions and bearing brightly coloured and appropriate slogans adorned the exterior walls and immediate surroundings of the courts. The Office of the Family Advocate as well as NGOs set up helpdesks and brightly coloured tables from which advice was given and appropriate literature was distributed to the public.

The IAWJ ensured intensive participation in the white ribbon and pledge

16 days of activism: A poem by Atlantis regional magistrate Sabrina Sonnenberg

Tell girl tell
When he take or touch
And your no! don’t count
Shout!

When the uncle flirts
And it hurts
Tell girl tell

Secrets must be sweet
When you worry and sweat
Tell girl tell

Somebody will listen
As soon as you tell

If gold and silver
Swore you to silence
You’re postponing the pain
’tis not time to be shy

If he steals your soul you’ll die
Tell girl tell.

Left: Judge Theron addressing the crowd
Below: Office of the Family Advocate at their table
postcard solidarity campaigns. White ribbons, which are synonymous with the 16 Days of Activism, were distributed to every person who was present. The postcards, which were a pledge for supporting the principles of the 16 Days of Activism, were also distributed to all present for completion. Returned postcards will form part of a National Wall of Solidarity in Pretoria. The sounds of music uncharacteristically filled the air when school choirs and young violin soloists entertained the bemused and almost disbelieving crowds that had gathered, with theme-appropriate songs and music. The Department of Correctional Services displayed the art and crafts of inmates of prisons, which were also theme-appropriate.

Institutions such as the SAPS, State Attorney’s office, the office of the Director of Public Prosecutions and members of the legal profession played a pivotal role in the organisation and execution of the programmes for the day. The Durban High Court boasted a gathering of many dignitaries, amongst whom were the DPP for KZN, Chief Prosecutors of the Province, Senior Counsel and members of the print and national visual media.

Judges and magistrates, court managers, administrative and security personnel were very visible and active at all court centres. Refreshments and snacks were served to members of the public. Each court centre invited guest speakers to address those that were present. The Judge President of Kwa Zulu Natal, the Honourable Justice Vuka Tshabalala and the speaker of the Ethekwini (Durban) Municipality, Councillor Nomusa Dube, spoke at the Durban High Court, while the former Provincial Minister of Health, Dr Zweli Mkhize and his wife addressed the public at the Pietermaritzburg High Court.

Magistrates Court Centres such as Durban, Empangeni, Ladysmith, Port Shepstone, Ramsgate and Verulam, to name a few, were equally abuzz with various activities such as setting up help desks, entertainment by various people and the display of banners. The initiative at the Durban Magistrates Court included lighting candles and praying for those lost to HIV/AIDS, as well as displaying an Aids Remembrance Quilt. Durban and Ladysmith arranged wonderful outreach programmes at primary schools. Durban Magistrates Court boasted a joint effort by the IAWJ, the Prosecution Authority, NGO’s Family Advocate SAPS and various other organisations when they visited a local school where, amongst other things, a mock trial (focusing on children in conflict with the Law), an anti-drugs campaign, an HIV/AIDS awareness programme and addresses by numerous speakers from different organisations were held. Food hampers and ‘goodie bags’ were given to each child. Similar initiatives were arranged in Ladysmith and Verulam.

The local press, radio stations and some national television stations covered the various activities. The programme held at the Durban High Court was featured in national television news bulletins throughout the day.

The IAWJ and all other organisations and institutions who collaborated with each other for the 16 Days of Activism, can be justifiably proud that their efforts in Kwa Zulu Natal went a long way to strengthening the solidarity movement whose aim it is to raise awareness around gender-based violence, to ensure better protection for the survivors of violence and to continue working towards the elimination of violence against vulnerable persons such as women and children.

A report on the initiatives in the rest of the country will follow in the next issue.