



THE UNITING  
PRESBYTERIAN  
CHURCH  
IN SOUTHERN  
AFRICA

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**GENDER DESK MESSAGE ON THE GENDER JUSTICE – FOR AUGUST MONTH**

*“He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6: 8 NIV)*

- In South Africa and Zimbabwe, August is recognized as Women's Month. Annually, August 9 is designated as Women's Day, to honour the courage, determination, and resolve of women and their contributions to society and the nation. Thus, the month of August is a period which offers a chance to honour all the women whose battles established the groundwork for the gains and advancements made so far in gender justice and the empowerment of women. Additionally, it is an opportune time to put into the spotlight, raise awareness of the problems that women, in general, and African women, particularly, have encountered and continue to confront, including gender-based violence, sexual harassment at the workplace, unfair pay, the exclusion of girls from education, and other related social ills.

This year's women's month began on the backdrop of the alleged heinous, horrific, and brutal gang rapes of eight women in Krugersdorp, South Africa. These women were part of a crew filming a music video and they were all robbed of their belongings, it is reported. In Zimbabwe's capital city, Harare, a well-known businessman, reportedly out on bail for domestic violence and threats of violence against his estranged girlfriend, allegedly pumped three bullets into her body in broad daylight, resulting in her gruesome death. There is an alarming and sudden spike in the reported number of persons in South Africa who have been murdered and raped, particularly women and children. Additionally, at least 10,818 occurrences of rape were reported in South Africa in the first quarter of the year. It was highlighted that almost half of these rapes—"a staggering 4,653 rapes"—took place at the victim's or the perpetrator's homes, primarily by a person known to the victim. Because of the abnormality of these circumstances, life cannot go on as "business as usual." The horrific cases of sexual assault against women and children, including murders, are a symptom of societal breakdown. The other side of the coin is equally detestable, as there are reports on men who are falling victims of gender-based violence. All should promote a peaceful society in which all human beings co-exist as God's people who are created in the image of God.

As the UPSCA, how do we visibly proclaim the Kingdom of God through unity, justice, peace and love in a broken, and hurting society? Not only are we His disciples, but "*We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:20 NIV)*" to take our place as the voice of the voiceless, the downtrodden, the marginalised, the abused and the violated. The Lord Jesus Christ serves as our example and pattern in the way he respected women and children to the extent of questioning the customs and rules of the day. We must ACT just like our Master did! That women bear God's likeness must move us away from paying lip service to issues that primarily affect them and, in turn, affect the whole society since they form an important constituency in the body of Christ. Women and children deserve to be treated with respect. Today, as the UPSCA, we must take our place in society as the "*salt of the earth and light of the world (Matthew 5: 13-16)*" and challenge the systems that lead to women and children becoming vulnerable: patriarchy, misogyny, sexism, poverty, sexual and gender-based violence, and media portrayals and cultural beliefs that vilify and are hurtful to women and children.

Justice is not merely a secular issue but a spiritual undertaking, and Micah's call (6:6-8) for justice follows from an observation that justice pleases God and is better than extreme religious sacrifices. The well-being and justice for women and children must be pursued and secured by all. There cannot be a disconnect between religious observance and ethical action; for "*... faith without deeds is dead (James 2:26)!*"

From the UPSCA's Gender Desk