

# GBVF fight needs all to work together



## OPINION

Lindi Dlamini

**D**uring his inauguration speech as SA's first democratically elected president, Nelson Mandela urged all of us to act together as a united people, for national reconciliation, for nation-building, for the birth of a new world.

This was expressed in his eloquent and moving words: "Never, never and never again shall it be that this beautiful land will again experience the oppression of one by another."

As we reflect on this powerful sentiment and the legacy of the father of our nation, it is important to realise that the struggle to end gender-based violence and femicide (GBVF) is far from won and the damage being done to society, economies and communities is getting more severe by the day. GBVF is unravelling the hopes and dreams we had as a nation when Mandela first walked free and set us on a path to freedom.

We need to invoke the same brave spirit of overcoming oppression today to ensure we can leave behind a society we can be proud of, and in which our children can be free, happy and not scared. This society should live up to the vision and expectations Mandela had for our beautiful land 28 years ago.

This calls to mind a quote from Mandela after his release from prison: "Since my release, I have become

more convinced than ever that the real makers of history are the ordinary people of our country; their participation in every decision about the future is the only guarantee of true democracy and freedom."

In this vein, one of the most important decisions all of us must make today is to end GBVF in our lifetimes. It will not be solved without sustained and deliberate effort from all sectors of society. This is a fight that needs all of us to come together as one, just as Mandela said.

With the National Strategic Plan on GBVF of 2020 as our guiding light, the GBVF Response Fund was set up as an independent, private sector-led entity aimed at galvanising a broader societal response to make a high impact on ending the scourge of GBVF as soon as possible.

We hit the ground running and are on track to help drive a much-needed co-ordinated response to this pandemic. In just a year and a half since establishment, we are now one of the key roleplayers in driving the multi-sectoral response needed to make a real difference, as it includes powerful and actionable government, civil society and private sector commitments. In our first grant funding phase, we have managed to support 110 high-impact, community-based organisations and four intermediary organisations in the fight against GBVF. The kinds of initiatives implemented by the approved grant partners will positively impact women, children, the LGBTQIA+ community, and other vulnerable groups.

The reason for adopting a mul-

ti-sectoral approach and working closely with sponsors, government and civil society is to bring about meaningful, sustainable and broad-based change. I am pleased to report that the approach to taking the fight of the survivors to a new level is working, but the road ahead is a long one. We need all of South Africa's people to have a greater awareness of the extent of the problem and help, as this cannot be done in isolation. Changing behaviours, long-held beliefs and stereotypes requires ongoing work on the ground, in the right areas, by those with the skills to bring about true, lasting change.

This is not just an SA problem either. The United Nations has called violence against women a "shadow pandemic". It says one in three women worldwide experience physical or sexual violence mostly by an intimate partner. Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation, and before the Covid-19 pandemic, 243 million women and girls, aged 15 to 49 experienced sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner a year. Since the pandemic, violence against women, especially domestic violence, has intensified.

We all need to do more, and together we can do more. The time to end GBVF is now. So, let's come together as one to meet the expectations of Mandela and let freedom and human rights reign in a manner that would make him proud.

• Lindi Dlamini is the CEO of the Gender-Based Violence and Femicide (GBVF) Response Fund.