

“Urgent action need to be taken to address violence and abuse in schools”

By Bernard Chiguvare

While the South African nation is busy battling scourges of poverty, unemployment, corruption, political wars and many other ills and frustrations, another serious matter has been raising its ugly head and is suddenly being shoved into the spotlight. Since the beginning of this school year alone, a series of cases involving gangsterism, bullying and abuse at schools have been reported from all over the country, showing a disturbingly rapid escalation of this problem, and the Vhembe region is not excluded.

Limpopo Mirror has already covered several incidents at local schools in the area this year where learners displayed extremely violent behaviour towards fellow pupils. In January, a learner at Masiza High School was assaulted with a sjambok by members of a gang (all learners at the school). In an incident prior to this, a learner at the same school was stabbed in the hand by a fellow pupil. At the start of February, a Grade 10 learner at Muthuhadini Combined School chased the principal around the school premises with an axe after his teacher reported him for disruptive behaviour during classes. In another incident prior to this, a learner at the same school stabbed a pupil from another school to death.

In a media statement release on 3 February this year, the Gen-

der-Based Violence Response Fund (The Fund) raised their concerns over the number of reported cases of violence and child abuse since the first term of school kicked off.

The Fund was launched by President Cyril Ramaphosa in 2021 as a funding vehicle to tackle the scourge of gender-based violence in South Africa.

According to Mr Tshepo Sefothelo, executive head: marketing and communications at The Fund, abuse takes on many forms. He said that reports of bullying, corporal punishment, assault, grooming, and physical abuse in schools were received regularly. Crime statistics generated by the South African Police Service (SAPS) show that 74% of students have reported being hit at school, while 41% have been bullied. Overall, 32% of learners report that they feel unsafe at school.

“The emotional, psychological, and physical consequences of abuse (in whichever form) affect learners’ academic performance, as well as their sense of self. We need to act urgently to address the scourge of violence against our children. It is essential to create a school environment that is more responsive to addressing abuse and violence. Educators need to take the initiative and create an environment where learners can report abuse, knowing that perpetrators will be held accountable. Stopping violence and abuse will require a 365-day effort,” said Sefothelo.