



## WHAT SISTER NAMIBIA HAS MEANT TO ME

– ROSA NAMISES

**S**ister Namibia is part of our social movement. It's been a voice expressing anger and frustration but also solutions and hope. We used it as our network base and followed it up with public campaigns to raise awareness about women's disadvantages and oppression. It gave rise to women's active involvement in recreating identities of gender and sexualities as it challenged images and stereotypes.

We were concerned with women's right to safety and peace long before independence came. I am 56 and I don't know how far back women have faced rape and violation by both the system, their partners and the men in uniform known as Koevoet or PLAN. The year 1989 saw the need to organize ourselves and form autonomous women's groups due to the oppressive and dominant systems that placed men first. We used campaigns, demonstrations and marches to draw attention to violence against women and children. We called on politicians, law makers, perpetrators and the justice system to help stop violence by introducing stronger measures. We called upon traditional leaders to speak out and address harmful cultural practices. We continued to protest for the introduction of equality and protective laws against violence. We introduced the "Claim back the night"

- campaign, which is an attempt to
- ensure safety for women in public,
- in homes, schools, educational
- facilities and the workplace –
- especially at night.

- We introduced the 16 Days of
- Activism Against Gender Based
- Violence. From 1992 to 2013
- we've held a series of national
- conferences on GBV. In 2000,
- demands were developed through
- joined manifestos known as the
- Namibian Women's Manifesto.
- There were other demands as well,
- expressed at different rallies and
- gatherings like the black Thursdays,
- the Multi Media Campaign to end
- violence against women, research
- and publications followed by
- petitions to the speaker of the
- National Assembly, the National
- Council, the head of the police, the
- magistrate and the Head of State.
- Manifesto items included, amongst
- others, women in decision-making
- positions – the 50/50 campaign,
- women and HIV/AIDS, violence
- against women and peace for
- women.

- These experiences and many
- ongoing actions, still led by women
- and their organizations, prove
- and demonstrate that a difference
- has been made in influencing the
- courts in giving harsher punishment
- to perpetrators of violence and
- seeking public opinion before
- granting bail. The women's
- movement led this fight and came

- to realize that men's participation
- is inevitable and based on the
- outcome of various consultations
- and discussions in 1998/1999, the
- first ever organized men's national
- conference was held. This resulted
- in the formation of Namibia Men
- For Change who vowed their
- support to the women's groups
- and movement to fight against
- violence in the Namibian society.
- The organization did not last long
- and died a natural death in 2007.
- However, the women's movement
- continued to grow in leaps and
- bounds across the nation and
- continued advocating for women's
- rights. The result is that new groups
- have emerged lead by younger
- women with new strategies. The
- call to recognize 365 days of
- Activism against Gender Based
- Violence by government has been
- accepted. Violence is debated at
- the highest level. The President's
- call for action, including the
- National prayer day has been
- answered, hence local governance
- in different towns had developed
- strategies to address violence.

- We need to continue to influence
- our men and boys to change their
- attitudes. We need to focus on the
- harmful cultural practices and keep
- the emphasis on education of the
- community. As long as violence
- and oppression remain, activists
- have work to do.

• By Rosalinda Namises