

Questions from an angry mother

The brutal death of 4 year old Fortuna Tenete in the Wanaheda Police Station holding cell shocked and left a very visceral impression on me. Though we call ourselves a "civil" society, there is nothing civil about what happened to this innocent child. This death could have been avoided if we, as a society, had more compassion. Therefore, as a mother and a Namibian citizen I would like to pose several hard-hitting questions. Instead of yelling them at the top of my voice, with fists clenched and misery in my heart, I will present my disenchantment as pleas.

- Mr President, since the budget makes such generous provision for the National Defence Force (NDF), why can you not share that money with the police force and the officers manning the Women and Child Protection Units so that we can get better defence against a real enemy - unlike the effort being put in defending us from an unknown enemy some time in the future? Please, I plead with you.
- Dr Sam Nujoma, I quote from an article in *The Republikein* from the 2nd August 2010 following the brutal murder of Magdalena Stoffels.
- "I would particularly like to express my concern about the recent spate of violent crimes directed at women and children. Those crimes represent a gross violation of the fundamental rights of our citizens and must therefore be condemned", said former President, Dr Sam Nujoma, at the opening of parliament on 11 February 2003.
- Eleven years later, the matter seems to have escalated:
- "The Legal Assistance Centre (LAC) is appalled by the brutal rape and slaying of a 17 year-old Grade 11 pupil at David Bezuidenhout High School on 27th July 2010. Cases of this nature have reached crisis proportions and need urgent interventions from Government".
- This was part of a statement made by Amon Nagvetene, the project Co-coordinator: AIDS Law Unit of the LAC on that same case. Have I missed a statement to the murder of little Fortuna Tenete or is he just not that important? Or have we become used to this situation in our country? What a crime it will be to think that Fortuna is of lesser value. What a sad awakening, if the lack of outcries about his death is evidence of our growing inability to be moved by atrocities like this.
- How can we trust the police force to safeguard peace and stability in a country where a 4 year old toddler shares a cell with a person capable of killing him? Sadly, this is not the first, nor will it be the last case of an innocent child murdered. Over the years we have lost others and their cases remained unsolved.

Year	Place	Name	Age	Case
2005	Swakopmund	Rachel Hamatunda	6	?
2005	Windhoek	Sofia Hoesemas	4	?
2006	Henties Bay	Clearance Enrico Xoagub	18	?
2007	Karibib	Unknown in the Karibib courts		?
2010	Keetmanshoop	Queen Dausab	2	?
2014	Windhoek	Nuusiku Hilda Nuujoma	4	?

Unsolved cases of child murders

How long will these cases continue to remain unsolved? Where is the justice for these innocent victims and their loved ones?

- I know I'm probably speaking to the wind, but to the Ministries of Health and Social Welfare, the Ministry and Safety and Security, what more can civil society do to inform you of the reality of our prisons and the unacceptable environment it is for a child - because I am sure this was not the first time a child went into a holding cell with his mother?
- Dear Mr Ombudsman, you called for drastic investigation measures; I hope this investigation is indeed forcefully executed by efficient and disciplined police members. From where I am standing, fist in the air, the death of little Fortuna Tenete could have been prevented.
- I do not understand why the Legal Assistance Centre could not have been called (via cell-phone or landline) for support with legal advice and assistance to the situation of Fortuna's misfortunate mother? As a member of the public I'm under the impression that they help in desperate cases like this..
- I may once again be displaying my ignorance. But could Lifeline/ChildLine not have been contacted? Would they not have been able to provide advice, or at the very least, an immediate referral, on the matter of the child to keep him from going into custody as well?
- What do the churches say? Do they not wish they had availed themselves to the Police to help out in situations like this? I'm sure many churches could have been contacted and would not have refused to assist. Or do our laws not provide for such interventions?
- With elections around the corner, my plea is that we will see change. May the new government take this tearful and heart-breaking condition serious and speed up the process of finalising the Child Care and Protection Bill. But may they sufficiently plan for its implementation as well. Beyond the building of childrens' homes and the establishment of, the operation of these will do so much for faith to be restored in Government's care and protection for the young ones. Laws on paper do not keep us alive, but the prioritising and enforcement of the measures aimed at protecting and nurturing our children. We need restored hope in our laws that are not only applauded beyond our borders, but especially within our borders. Government is like a parent. When something goes wrong in the house, our first inclination is to blame those who are in charge - whether for commission or omission.

In the end we can point fingers and blame various stakeholders, but at the end of the day, neither Fortuna nor any of the other children who have been relegated to the status of unsolved cases can be brought back to us. But others can be shared from sharing their fate. The public outcry has been heard but needs intervention and action. Leaders in government, civil society, private sector and individuals must band together to ensure that laws are enforced, order is restored and thus ensure that another innocent children in this country does not meet such an untimely end.

BIANCA FOELSCHER