

**THE DEPUTY MINISTER OF PUBLIC WORKS, MR NTOPILE KGANYAGO,MP, GIVES A SPEECH ON THE OCCASION TO LAUNCH A BOOK ON WORKPLACE DIGNITY, ORGANIZED BY THE WORKPLACE DIGNITY INSTITUTE**

**Date: Friday, 28 September 2006**

**Venue: SA Human Rights Commission Offices, Park town. Johannesburg, Gauteng**

- **The Author, publisher, chairperson and founder of the Institute, Dr Suzan Steinman**
- **Professor Anton Senekal**
- **The Deputy Chairperson of SA Human Rights Commission: Dr. Zonke Majodina**
- **The SAHRC Commissioner: Dr. Leon Wessels**
- **Senior officials of SA Human Rights Commission**
- **The business community, chief Directors, directors and colleagues from government departments, business Members, colleagues and friends of Workplace Dignity Institute**
- **Members of the Media (Electronic & Print)**
- **The Programme Director, Ms. Vernie Chetty-Henson**
- **Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen**

The choice of a medium remains a means to an end; and the end is always to convey a shared meaning through powerful messages. Many of us who grew up in rural areas under a harsh environment created by apartheid and its institutions such as Bantu Education, will recall that story telling, in the

absence of popular media, became a compelling medium for moralization, socialization and acculturation.

To be integrated into the society and its cultural values and norms as children we relied on the story-telling abilities of our family their and extended families to inculcate certain morals and instill acceptable behaviours. As ridiculous as some of these folk-stories sounded, the impact was that they had a strong moral which challenged our perceptions and shaped our social relations. Many folk-tales were composed and recited, often using animals as metaphors for good and evil, strong and weak, as well as intelligent and stupid.

One of my favorite was the story of the manipulative hyena (phiri), which went to the lion to and withdraw its allegiance. When the angry lion demanded reasons, the hyena simply said because the lion was not the king of the jungle anymore. In anger, the lion asked to be taken to meet this new king of the jungle called the hunter. On the way, they came across an old man and the lion asked, is this the new king of the jungle? The hyena laughed and said no, that used to be, not anymore. Further down the path they saw a young boy and the lion roared. The hyena interjected and

said, no that was not a hunter but would grow up to be. When they eventually met the hunter, the hyena said: Mr Lion, let me introduce to you the new king of the jungle. The lion could only roar once before the fateful arrow pierced through its heart. The hyena had won again, willfully pitting the lion and the hunter, to get rid of the lion.

Consequently, the bush legend has never been kind to the hyenas. They are known to have deceptive, callous and manipulative characters. Sadly, we have such characters in our midst and many of them have duped us into appointing them into positions of power from where they continue to unleash their malice.

Fortunately, the South African society has since 1996 been bequeathed with a supreme law in the form of a constitution that entrenches the right of every person to dignity. Even if you may disagree with the person, you may not take away their right to privacy, dignity and life.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour for me to deliver this key note address at the launch of one of the best straight-to-the-heart and hard hitting book. Although I still try

very hard to bring myself to terms with the title, I believe Dr Steinman has fearlessly and almost single-handedly confronted a subject; most of us would prefer to avoid - **Workplace violence** in all its forms – physical and emotional like bullying and mobbing, verbal abuse, racial and sexual harassment and the use of overt or covert threats. Be it physical or psychological, it has become a global problem crossing borders, work settings and occupational groups. Violence at work has dramatically gained momentum in recent years and is now a priority concern in both industrialized and developing countries.

The book investigates and exposes the rise of bullying and workplace violence worldwide in the form of the Workplace Hyena and their negative impact on the organization.

Earlier in the week, the National Department of Public Works convened a conference on the effects of corruption, fraud and maladministration on public service delivery. At the same gathering, speakers and participants alike agreed on the corrosive role of corruption and its impact on the reputation, morale, productivity and profits. Corruption was,

among others described as an outcome of **“an interdependent system in which a part of the system is either not performing duties it was originally intended to, or performing them in an improper way, to the detriment of the system’s original purpose”**. The same can be said about workplace violence and its consequences on staff morale brought by a sense of loss of respect, worth and esteem by employees.

But let us turn to the issue of workplace violence. This affects the dignity of millions of people worldwide. It is a major source of inequality, discrimination, stigmatization and conflict at the workplace. Increasingly it is becoming a central human rights issue. At the same time, workplace violence is increasingly appearing as a serious, sometimes lethal threat to the efficiency and success of organisations. Violence causes immediate and often long-term disruption to interpersonal relationships, the organisation of work and the overall working environment.

While workplace violence and bullying affects practically all sectors and all categories of employees, the corporate

sector is not free from physical violence, while mainly dealing with emotional violence.

It has been estimated by a number of reliable studies that stress and violence together possibly account for approximately 30% of the overall costs of ill-health and accidents. The evidence clearly indicates that workplace violence is far too high and that interventions are urgently needed. Further, more specific evidence is available in each country which should be used to increase awareness of the importance of the problem of workplace violence and to make it a priority target for all people operating in or concerned with the corporate and service sectors.