

Press Statement

Deep institutional and societal changes needed to fight femicide

The brutal femicide of Bernice Cassar, allegedly at the hands of her estranged husband, is a stark reminder that our society and institutions have a long way to go to effectively address the scourge of violence against women. Bernice Cassar is the third victim of femicide this year.

Bernice Cassar had filed multiple reports of domestic violence against her estranged husband up to the day before her murder. She was clearly fearing for her safety and for the safety of her children and had done everything in her power to keep herself and her children safe.

It is both saddening and alarming that, despite all her actions, Bernice Cassar was cold bloodedly murdered in broad daylight. The system has failed her as well as all other women whose experiences of violence and abuse continue to be minimised or dismissed. Notwithstanding the notable legal advancements addressing violence against women, the social support, law enforcement and judicial systems are still far from adequately protecting women from perpetrators of violence against them.

It is to be underlined that femicide is the extreme end of a continuum of violence emanating from a patriarchal society where some men feel entitled to exert power and control over women. For example, we often witness, even in public fora, sexist micro-aggressions, comments, insults and the attempted humiliation of women, especially of those women who do not conform to stereotypical gender roles. Whilst institutional change is of utmost importance, societal change is also essential to address the root causes of violence against women. Strong political and public discourse supporting women's rights can be a catalyst for this change to materialise.

Justice for Bernice Cassar and for all other victims of femicide and violence against women will only be truly achieved when our social and institutional structures start equally valuing and respecting women and their experiences.

The Commission notes that women are continuously doing their utmost to protect themselves from intimate partner violence, including femicide, without success.

We ask: what else can women do for the institutions to listen to their plea for help and protect them adequately to continue living a peaceful life? Bernice Cassar tried to seek protection in



every possible way. The onus to ensure safety from violence against women lies squarely on the institutions. The responsibility to fight gender inequality lies on all of us.

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