



CABINET STATEMENT

TO : ALL MEDIA
EMBARGO : IMMEDIATE

KWAZULU-NATAL CLARIFIES STANCE ON UKUTHWALA

Pietermaritzburg, 21 November 2012: The KwaZulu-Natal Executive Council met with the Commission for Gender Equality (GCE) in Pietermaritzburg today and took the opportunity to clarify recent statements attributed to the Commission regarding the Government's response to ukuthwala.

The practice of kidnapping girls for the purpose of marriage is prevalent in parts of the Province and there has been an increase in recent years of incidents of criminal abductions, some involving school girls.

Commissioner Janine Hicks told Cabinet:

"The CGE has noted with concern statements in the media indicating that the Commission has criticized the KwaZulu-Natal Government for failing to eradicate the practice of ukuthwala. In our report, we have outlined the findings stemming from our investigation, including instances where we have acknowledged proactive measures implemented by individual Departments, such as the Office of the Premier and the Department of Education. The GCE is encouraged by such best practice and by the leadership shown by the Province in ensuring a coordinated response to ukuthwala.

"Our report does, however, surface challenges encountered and gaps in the State response. These include the need for reporting measures to ensure statistics on ukuthwala are gathered, and much-needed protocol and guidelines developed for district-based officials, particularly among the South African Police Service and provincial prosecution authority, to ensure reported cases are investigated and prosecuted."

The Commission recently released its findings on the State response to the practice in KwaZulu-Natal. The purpose of the investigation was to assess whether Provincial Departments were responding adequately to criminal acts of abduction, sexual assault and forced marriage of children currently being witnessed in KwaZulu-Natal and the Eastern Cape and defended as a traditional practice of ukuthwala.

The Provincial Government has established a task team on ukuthwala to co-ordinate departmental interventions and is currently conducting research on the extent and impact of harmful traditional practices.



The Commission's report also calls for greater awareness-raising measures with communities and families by traditional leadership and civil society.

Premier Dr Zweli Mkhize re-affirmed the Provincial Government's commitment to working with the Commission for Gender Equality and all other stakeholders to facilitate the protection of human rights, including those of women that were always protected traditionally.

"We do not expect to conduct interactions between ourselves through the media as we have indicated to the Commission that our doors are open at all times. We are pleased that we have cleared the air around the work we are doing to address the challenge of ukuthwala in KwaZulu-Natal."

Issued by the Office of the Premier on behalf of Cabinet

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