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SEXUAL MISCONDUCT IN EDUCATION- NO LET-UP

NAPTOSA has noted with grave concern the submission on sexual gender-based violence made by the South African Council for Educators (SACE) to the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Basic Education last week, which shows no let-up in cases of this nature.

After all the focus and campaigns on gender-based violence (GBV) and school-related, gender-based violence (SRGBV), it is very disheartening to learn that 160 cases of sexual misconduct by teachers were reported to SACE during the period April 2020 to July 2021. As we know by now, not all cases get reported, which means that the actual number is probably much higher.

Viewed against the fact that schools were closed for substantial periods since April 2020 and that the pandemic has exacerbated the vulnerability of learners, the reported numbers are even more distressing.

It is unfathomable, but at the same time not surprising, that teachers are prepared to throw away their careers in this fashion. Sexual crime is so endemic in our society that it is bound to spill over into the sphere of schooling.

The SACE report came in the same week as the publication of the crime statistics for the first quarter of 2021, which showed a staggering increase of 74,1% in sexual offences compared to the same period last year. While the Minister of Police attempted to play down this increase by explaining that the figures were skewed due to the pandemic and that the increase over 2019 (a normal period) was 5%, the 10 000 reported rape cases in a three-month period cannot be motivated away, however one may try. Even a 5% increase is a tragedy.

Emerging trends identified by SACE of female teachers abusing male learners and of teachers taking advantage of learners in special needs schools, means that the scope of gender-based violence in our schools are broadening even more. NAPTOSA condemns all sexual offences whether perpetrated in the general society or within the school environment, but as an education union our condemnation runs even deeper when it involves teachers who commit such acts against learners.

We urge members to adhere to our Charter of Professionalism that *inter alia* deals with the issue of improper and inappropriate relations with learners and not to shy away from reporting colleagues who make themselves guilty of acts of sexual misconduct.

NAPTOSA will continue to speak out against GBV and SRGBV. We will also not be derailed from our anti-SRGBV campaign, despite the negative reports that this plague appears not to be abating in our schools.

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR