
MEDIA RELEASE

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aQuellé - THE REAL VICTIM

Kwasizabantu Mission including their projects aQuellé and Emseni Farming have been the subject of a severe onslaught of allegations, including rape, sexual assault, money laundering and being a cult. Most of the allegations are vague, lacking any real particularity. This makes it difficult to respond in a meaningful way. The obvious intention of this machine gun attack strategy is to make it difficult to cover every aspect of the attack. No doubt the hope is that even if one suspicion remains then the attackers would have succeeded with those people who act out of expediency rather than principle.

To address this, we have done the following:

1. **In anticipation of making submissions to our Panel, we have immediately started investigating the allegations.** Whilst not wanting to pre-empt its full submissions to the Panel (we aim to have these submissions done and presented to the Panel within the next 7 – 10 days), in an attempt to mitigate the present huge damage to the Mission as a result of this malicious onslaught, the Mission provides feedback from its own preliminary internal investigation which has been possible, given the time constraints on it.
2. We are also investigating whether there has been any direct or indirect financial gain by NEWS 24 as a result of its malicious “reporting”. Here we are in particular exploring the effect of its “Exodus” product on its subscriptions and the financial gain for our accusers.

ALLEGATIONS OF RAPE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT

Amanda (not real name):

In the Exodus “documentary” and interview Amanda alleged that she was given what she called a “spiritual hiding” which consisted of rape and sexual assault.

We have concern for victims who suffer abuse and are therefore in a fragile state, however, we emphatically deny knowledge of this incident.

Erika Bornman:

She alleges that she was sexually assaulted by Muzi Kunene. She states that she did not report it to anyone at the time. She claims that she informed Rev. Stegen about this after she left the Mission. She alleges that she was suspended and expelled from the Mission school when she was 16 and at the same time told by her mother to leave the house.

The Mission and Erika’s mother deny that Erika was suspended or expelled. It is also denied that Erika was “sent away” at any time by the Mission or her mother. The Mission is unaware of any evidence that supports Erika’s allegation that she reported “sexual assault” after she left the Mission at the age of 21 and not 16 as she claimed.

Marietjie Bothma:

The Mission was unaware of the allegations made in the media regarding sexual and other abuses. We understand the pain and suffering of a vulnerable and defenseless child facing such abuse. However, she claims that the alleged abuse took place in the ‘church building’ in 1988 while the family only moved to the ‘church building’ in 1993. What was known to the Mission is that her sister was the subject of abuse by their step-father. This matter was addressed after her sister exposed it. Their step-father then left and has subsequently passed away.

Chantal Engelbrecht:

She alleges that she was raped 'before she had even turned 16' / 'prior to August 1985'. She alleges that she reported it to the police in November 2019.

The incident did not happen at the Mission or during any Mission activity. Neither resided, were employed or attended school on the Mission - they were congregants. We have consulted with the young man who was involved with her at the time. Our investigations thus far reveal that it was in fact he who in approximately 1987 first disclosed to his spiritual counsellor that he and Chantal had had a consenting premarital affair in the same year. This confession by him was dealt with by the counsellor at the time.

Nelda (not real name):

Nelda alleges that she was raped in the late 1980s when she was 5 years old. She suppressed the memory and "put it away". She alleges that when she was 16 years old she could "put it in to words exactly what had happened" (sic). A year later she informed her parents. By the time she reported it to her parents, the family had moved away from the Mission. It is unclear whether her parents laid charges at the SAPS as no authorities ever came to the Mission to investigate.

We have reasonable basis to assume the identity of Nelda and that her claim is not credible and is unfounded. We will present the basis for our assumptions to the independent panel and invite her to provide us with full details.

VIRGINITY TESTING

Allegation: The Mission has tolerated, overlooked and/or facilitated virginity testing in contravention of subsection 12 (4) to (6) of the Children's Act, 2005.

Response: When the school was established in 1986, the Zulu members of the parent body of the school at one stage insisted on this cultural practice with their own children (not as a school policy but their own practice). At that time, about 85% of pupils at the school were Zulu and initially the Mission did not feel it right to impose Western culture to abolish this tradition. After consultation with the parents, this practice was discontinued from 2002.

CORPORAL PUNISHMENT

Response about physical abuse: It was the practice of the Mission school, since its inception in 1986, to use reasonable and moderate corporal punishment in line with all other schools in South Africa at the time. In 1994, a year before the Department of Education banned the practice of corporal punishment, the school suspended it. In early 1996 it was officially banned by the school at a special meeting for parents.

There were aberrations and excesses of corporal correction before 1994, which were dealt with by Church discipline and teaching. (As we have said in the past, we say again: If there are still any outstanding issues pre-1994 regarding corporal correction, the individuals concerned should please come forward so that reconciliation can be facilitated).

The Mission condemns gender-based violence in any form. Despite the lack of demonstrable evidence to support the allegations at this stage, the Mission is sensitive to the issue and supportive of any victims of rape and/or sexual assault.

ENDS

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