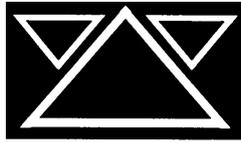


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LEGAL ASSISTANCE CENTRE

Recipient of the UNICEF Maurice Pate Human Rights Award – 1997
JP Karuaihe Human Rights Award – 2008, 2010 and 2013

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PRESS RELEASE: TEACHER-LEARNER RELATIONSHIPS

The Legal Assistance Centre extends its condolences to the family of Jacqueline Kuaseua and Cecilia Kambuu Kuaseua. Their tragic murder has sent shockwaves across the nation. Many people have asked whether it is permissible for a teacher to have a relationship with a learner. The answer is a clear and emphatic no.

All teachers in Namibia are required to adhere to “The Code of Conduct for the Teaching Service”. One of the clauses in the code clearly states that a teacher:

“may not become involved in any form of romance or sexual relations with a learner or sexual harassment or abuse of a learner”.

Failure to adhere to the Code of Conduct can result in disciplinary procedures, which ultimately can lead to dismissal of the teacher. Such prohibitive and clear consequences should be enough of a deterrent to any teacher. Learners too should be made aware of this clause and of the fact that it is not appropriate for a teacher to engage in a relationship with a learner.

However, reality is very different. Sadly, the clause is currently not deterring teacher-learner relationships. Data reported by the Ministry of Education shows that there are dozens of reported teacher-learner relationships. How many more go unreported?

What more needs to be done? There is already a legal mechanism in place and so yet again we are forced to call for better implementation. The Ministry of Education must do better in investigating and adequately implementing disciplinary measures when cases are reported. Safeguards must be put in place to ensure that a teacher cannot escape investigation by merely resigning from his or her position. Schools employing new teachers should do thorough background checks on staff before employing them. Children are one of the most vulnerable groups in our society. We must give them the safest possible environment and this means ensuring that all staff employed are of the highest calibre – something that includes their moral standards.

But responsibility is not with government alone. We call on all teachers to hold their peers accountable for their actions. We call on all parents and communities to be vigilant and to support our learners whether through reporting of a known teacher-learner relationship or by helping a child who speaks out about a relationship with a teacher. And we call on our learners to speak out and engage with trusted adults and their fellow learners should they be confronted with any inappropriate situation. Policy and law can create a framework but as individuals we must uphold these values.

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