

FAREWELL TO WOMEN'S SOLIDARITY

Anne Rimmer, Legal Assistance Centre, 2004

The Legal Assistance Centre notes with deep regret that Women's Solidarity has closed its doors after 15 years of working to protect women and children from violence.

Lack of funding from donors has meant that the organization is no longer able to continue its essential services. Sadly, Women's Solidarity's outreach work in schools and communities, provision of a free counseling service, and research on the issue of violence against women and children are needed more than ever before.

Women's Solidarity a Katutura-based NGO, was set up in 1989 by a group of professional women who attended a meeting at the LAC about rape and knew they had to take action to help the victims.

Women's Solidarity was the first non-governmental organization set up in Namibia to tackle violence against women and children. In the early days rape was a taboo subject and domestic violence was not discussed publicly. Inspired by Women's Solidarity, there are now tens of organizations in the country dealing either solely or partly with these issues. Reports on, and discussions of, rape and domestic violence regularly occur in the media. There can be few Namibians who are now unaware of the issues.

The news of the closure of Women's Solidarity has been greeted with great sadness – but also with frustration. Now that the Combating of Domestic Violence Act has finally been passed, there is a great need to conduct workshops with communities on its provisions. With the increase in rape in our country, there remains the urgent need to educate the young. And while young women continue to be increasingly at risk of HIV infection, every effort to make gender equality a reality should be valued highly. The value that Women's Solidarity gave to Namibia is long lasting – and we salute all staff and volunteers who were part of this unique organization.