CSVR Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

Australian High Commission South Africa

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Embassy of Switzerland to South Africa, Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia

UN WOMEN

FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS

4th Southern Africa Gender-Based Violence Prevention Forum

Theme: From Rhetoric to Implementation: Strengthening Accountability and Action in Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response in Southern Africa

Date: 7–8 October 2026

Location: Pretoria, Hatfield

1. Background

Southern Africa is in the grip of a gender-based violence (GBV) crisis that is escalating, not receding. In South Africa alone, an estimated 15 women are murdered every day, and the country's femicide rate stands at roughly five to six times the global average. The scale of the crisis prompted South Africa to declare gender-based violence and femicide a national disaster. Just this month, a fresh spate of killings in Gauteng has left communities shocked, angry and afraid, with police unable to rule out a serial perpetrator and women once again being told to limit their own movement rather than being guaranteed protection. This pattern is not confined to South Africa; it reflects a regional emergency in which women and girls across Southern Africa continue to be hunted, silenced and failed by the systems meant to protect them.

Despite the development of laws, policies, strategies and commitments aimed at preventing and responding to GBV, the gap between these commitments and their implementation is not merely a technical shortfall — it is costing lives daily. Survivors and communities continue to face barriers to justice, protection and appropriate support, while limited resources, fragmented institutional responses, and even gaps in how femicide is recorded and disaggregated from general crime data obscure the true scale of the problem and hinder accountability. Emerging forms of violence, including technology-facilitated violence, compound an already dire situation. Civil society and human rights bodies are increasingly vocal that platitudes and promises are no longer enough, what is needed now is decisive, measurable action.

It is against this urgent backdrop that the Fourth Southern Africa Gender-Based Violence (GBV) Prevention Forum will take place on 7–8 October 2026 in Pretoria, Hatfield, South Africa, convened by the Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR). Building on a regional convening process that began in 2023 as the Southern Africa GBV Prevention Symposium and has since evolved into a regional Forum, it will bring together stakeholders working to prevent and respond to GBV across the region.

Across the first three editions, a recurring concern has been the gap between policy commitments and meaningful implementation. The Fourth Forum will therefore serve as a review and learning process, creating space to examine what has changed since the previous convenings, which approaches have generated useful lessons, where implementation has remained a challenge.

Through a focused and participatory format, the Forum will emphasise reflection, peer learning and practical engagement among government, civil society, regional and international

organisations, survivors' networks, youth movements, community-based organisations. It will place institutional accountability, lived experiences and lessons from practice at the centre of discussions on strengthening GBV prevention and response in Southern Africa.

2. Purpose of the Forum

The Forum seeks to strengthen regional dialogue and collective action on GBV prevention and response by reflecting on existing commitments, peer learning and identification of best practices for improving accountability, justice and institutional responsiveness. Building on three previous editions of the Symposium and Forum, it will examine what has changed since 2023. It will create space for stakeholders to consider the institutional, financial and coordination challenges affecting implementation, while ensuring that survivor, youth and community perspectives inform the discussion.

The Forum will seek to strengthen continuity between regional convenings by connecting lessons from previous editions to concrete, attributable and trackable actions.

3. Key Areas of Discussion

3.1 From Commitments to Implementation and Accountability

Taking stock of commitments and recommendations emerging from previous regional and national processes; examining progress, stalled implementation and the institutional, financial and coordination conditions required to translate commitments into action.

3.2 Justice, Protection and Survivor-Centred Accountability

Examining barriers to reporting, justice, protection, referral pathways and psychosocial, health and social support, with attention to institutional responsiveness, survivor-centred accountability and community-based approaches.

3.3 Prevention, the Changing Forms of GBV and What Works in Practice

Reflecting on community-led prevention, youth leadership, engaging men and transforming harmful masculinities, prevention financing and sustainability, and approaches addressing changing forms of GBV, including femicide and technology-facilitated violence. Discussions will consider what evidence, and practice can teach us about effective and adaptable prevention.

3.4 Structural Inequality, Migration and Emerging Vulnerabilities

Exploring the intersections between GBV, economic inequality, women's economic security, climate change, displacement and migration. Building on evidence from CSVR's Making Migration Safe for Women project, the Forum will consider barriers faced by migrant and displaced women and opportunities to strengthen accessible, survivor-centred and cross-border responses.

3.5 Regional Cooperation and From Dialogue to Action

The Forum will examine how regional cooperation can strengthen GBV prevention and response, particularly where challenges extend beyond national systems. Discussions will consider the role of governments, civil society and regional institutions in sharing lessons,

strengthening policy implementation and addressing gaps in coordination, referral pathways and survivor protection across borders.

Drawing on the reflections and lessons emerging from the Forum, participants will identify priority actions, the actors responsible for advancing them, and practical mechanisms for monitoring progress and maintaining accountability between regional convenings.

4. Objectives

The Fourth Forum will:

1. Reflect on the evolution of the Symposium and Forum since 2023 and identify key lessons from the first three editions.
2. Examine progress and persistent gaps in translating GBV-related laws, policies and commitments into practice.
3. Facilitate peer learning and exchange on approaches, partnerships and institutional responses across countries and sectors.
4. Create space for survivor, youth and community perspectives to inform reflection on what is working and what needs to change.
5. Identify practical priorities and mechanisms for strengthening accountability, collaboration and continuity between Forum editions.

5. Regional Participation

The Forum will bring together stakeholders from across Southern Africa, including government institutions, civil society organisations, survivor and community representatives, development partners, researchers, practitioners and regional actors.

Participation will include representatives from Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, creating an opportunity for cross-country learning and regional collaboration.

The inclusion of Madagascar further strengthens the regional character of the Forum and creates opportunities to share experiences beyond the countries represented in previous engagements.

6. Expected Outcomes

The Forum is expected to contribute to:

- A shared understanding of progress, persistent gaps and lessons from the GBV prevention agenda since 2023;
- Identification of practical lessons and approaches that can inform improved practice;
- Identified priorities for strengthening institutional accountability, prevention and survivor-centred responses;
- Identification of opportunities for regional collaboration and shared learning;
- Follow up mechanisms to support continuity between Forum editions.

CSVR
Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation

Australian High Commission
South Africa

Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft
Confédération suisse
Confederazione Svizzera
Confederaziun svizra

Embassy of Switzerland to South Africa,
Botswana, Eswatini, Lesotho and Namibia

UN WOMEN

FOR ALL WOMEN AND GIRLS