

“The Role of the VEP in the Monitoring & Oversight of the DV Act and Victim's Charter”

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South Africa's VEP recently celebrated its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, although many argued that they have little to celebrate. Certainly, in terms of *implementing* the policy aimed at supporting survivors of sexual assault and domestic violence, our achievements have been nominal. Yes, the DV Act has been promulgated, and we finally have a Victim's Charter, but to date there has been an absence of the political will necessary to ensure that these instruments are appropriately resourced and monitored. The DV Act has been similarly constrained – minimal implementation, minimal – and largely ineffective - monitoring.

One of the primary goals of Victim Empowerment is to reduce secondary traumatisation, and it is even acknowledged that much of that secondary traumatisation is caused by inadequate or inappropriate responses from the police, health, and social workers. Ironically, however, the people responsible for monitoring and evaluating those services *are the providers themselves*. The traditional role of civil society, i.e. that of providing oversight and ensuring that victim's rights are realised, is generally met with outrage from these agencies, which has led to TVEP being regarded, at least in Limpopo Province, as being “Public (Service) Enemy No.1”. Frequently our “right” to challenge poor service delivery is itself challenged, and we are accused of going beyond our mandate by trying to address such issues. The need for civilian oversight is not just being overlooked, it is being denied!

Currently, VEP's role is interpreted as being confined to the provision of lay counselling and referral services for victims of crime. Ironically, volunteers used for this purpose are not even trained on victim's rights, let alone on what to do if they are violated by state agencies. Furthermore, the current structure of the VEP requires volunteers to report to committees led, and thus controlled, by representatives of those same agencies.

Through this address, TVEP will suggest that the restructuring and realigning of VEP, and the retraining of VEP volunteers as Victim Advocates, is imperative if we are to ensure that Victims Rights are realised in a sustainable and practical manner.