**Vice-Chancellor’s notes – Gender-Based Violence and Femicide Assembly and First Things First - 13 Nov. 2023**

***Protocol List***

Deputy Minister of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Science and Innovation, Mr Bhuti Manamela

The Chief Executive Officer for Higher Health, Prof Ramneek Ahluwalia

Members of the University Management Committee

Senior Management members

Staff members

Student Leaders and student populace

Ladies and gentlemen

A warm welcome to the ***2023 Gender-based Violence and Femicide Assembly and First Things First***, hosted by the North-West University in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training, Science and Innovation, Higher Health, and Vuselela TVET College. We are grateful for this partnership and that this important engagement is hosted at our institution. As we work towards addressing the pressing issue of gender-based violence and femicide, it is important for us to acknowledge the impact it has on our journey towards achieving **Sustainable Development Goal number 5**, which is to ***achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls by 2030***. This further aligns closely with the African Union Strategy for Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment (GEWE) 2018-2028, a framework that we wholeheartedly embrace.

In the words of the former President, Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, ***"Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression."*** These words resonate well with the global commitment to eliminate all forms of violence against women and girls in the public and private spheres, including the higher education sector. As institutions of higher learning in collaboration with our partners, it is our responsibility to align with these imperatives, in order to contribute to gender-inclusive education, nurturing the empowerment of women in leadership roles, and promoting research that systematically addresses gender disparities. We further need to create more platform for constructive dialogue, collaboration, and transformative action towards a future free from gender-based violence and any form of discrimination. Deputy Minister, I can confirm that at the North-West University we are deeply committed to the course.

The statistics presented in the 2023 State of the Nation address on gender-based violence (GBV) points out the urgency of our mission. More than **51%** of women in South Africa have experienced violence at the hands of someone they know. This does not only represent a violation of human rights but also the impediment to ensuring a safe environment for women in our country.

The Journal for public health reveals that over **177 620** reported cases of sexual offenses in **2020** alone. These figures are shocking and demand our immediate attention, but more importantly, they demand coordinated and sustained actions from all of us, to uproot and eliminate the root cause of gender-based violence.

**Prof Ramneek**, the document on gender-based violence at higher education institutions in South Africa, provided by Safer Spaces, reveals concerning statistics, that about **35.4%** of students experience sexual violence, with only **28.2%** reporting the incidents. These figures highlight the urgent need for universities and other stakeholders to not only educate but actively work towards eliminating violence on campuses. Hence at the NWU we continuously strive to build awareness and create an ecosystem that prevent violence, support survivors, and promote a non-discriminatory culture.

As we engage, let us be guided by the words of the late, uMam’uAlbertina Sisulu, who once said, ***“Women are the people who are going to relieve us from all this oppression and depression. The rent boycott that is happening in Soweto now [in the 1980s] is alive because of the women. It is the women who are on the street committees educating the people to stand up and protect each other.”***The role of women in the development of our country is of utmost importance. Women's struggles and their liberation are intertwined with the liberation of mankind*.*In the context of this assembly, it is important that we recognise that the fight against gender-based violence is a collective endeavour that requires the active participation of everyone, men and women alike. May these collaborative efforts and policy changes lead to a future where every individual, regardless of gender, can pursue their dreams free from the spectre of violence.

Thank you. Enkosi. Ke a leboga. Baie Dankie.