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Joint Statement by Gender Justice Advocacy and Litigation Center and the Botswana Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Support Center

We, the Gender Justice Advocacy and Litigation Center and the Botswana Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Support Center, stand united in unequivocal support of the Department of Public Prosecutions' decision to deny bail to the accused prosecutor in the recent gender-based violence case. This decision reflects a commitment to uphold justice, protect vulnerable individuals, and send a clear message that gender-based violence will not be tolerated, regardless of the perpetrator's status or position.

Understanding Trauma Bonding: A Call for Compassionate Awareness

The victim's testimony in favor of granting bail has sparked confusion and criticism, leading to victim-blaming and a lack of understanding of the complexities surrounding abusive relationships. This reaction underscores the urgent need to educate the public about trauma bonding, a psychological response where victims of abuse develop strong emotional attachments to their abusers.

Trauma bonding is not a sign of weakness or complicity; it is a survival mechanism that can trap individuals in harmful relationships. Victims may defend their abusers due to fear, dependency, or manipulation, not because they condone the abuse. Understanding this is crucial to prevent further harm and to support victims in their journey toward healing.

The Need for Stronger Legal Protections

The prevalence of gender-based violence in Botswana is alarmingly high. Despite these statistics, the legal system often fails to provide adequate protection for victims.

We call for the following actions:

- **Tightening Bail Laws:** Individuals charged with violent crimes, especially gender-based violence offenses, should be denied bail to prevent further harm and ensure the safety of victims.

- **Inclusion of Expert Testimony:** Courts should consider expert testimony from psychologists and other professionals to understand the psychological dynamics of abusive relationships and make informed decisions.
- **Public Education Campaigns:** Initiatives to educate the public about the complexities of gender-based violence, including trauma bonding, are essential to reduce victim-blaming and promote a more supportive environment for survivors.

Conclusion

We commend the Department of Public Prosecutions for its decision to deny bail in this case, setting a precedent for handling gender-based violence cases with the seriousness they deserve. We urge the public to approach such situations with empathy and understanding, recognizing that victims may not always act in ways that align with societal expectations due to the complex nature of abuse.

Together, we can foster a society that supports survivors, holds perpetrators accountable, and works toward the eradication of gender-based violence.

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For support and help

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