



PRESS RELEASE | MEDIAVERKLARING

SWARTSKAAP DOCUMENTARY SHEDS A DIFFERENT LIGHT ON THE WORK OF WELFARE ORGANISATIONS

“SwartskAAP”, a new documentary that can be viewed on VIA, DStv channel 147 this coming Thursday 29 June at 14h00, aims to provide viewers with a glimpse into the day-to-day reality of the child protection organisation (CPO) CMR North. Since early 2022, the organisation and associated social workers have been at the receiving end of a brutal public attack, and SwartskAAP, for the first time, sheds a very different light on their story.

Minister Danie Janse van Rensburg, Chairperson of the CMR North Board, explains that the events that unfairly portrayed the organisation in a poor light started with the highly-publicised case of Abrie Raaths, who is currently serving four life sentences for raping his daughter Megan in 2008. Fourteen years after, in 2022, Megan publicly stated to the media that she and her family would be seeking legal assistance to free Abrie, as she was coerced to accuse her father by CMR North, and specifically by Wilna Stander, who was an independent social worker at the time and who conducted the initial socio-emotional assessment on Megan. When the story broke, neither CMR North nor Wilna could provide in-depth comment on it due to their profession’s ethical code, which was generally construed as an admission of guilt, which Janse van Rensburg says could not be further away from the truth.

Firstly, the CMR North’s role in respect of the Abrie Raath’s case was misconstrued. According to law, there is a predetermined procedure that needs to be followed from the moment child abuse is reported to a CPO like CMR North, which includes an independent investigation by SAPS and a medical examination by a doctor before all the evidence from the various parties is finally brought before a Criminal Court. “It is therefore quite preposterous and not even logical

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to accuse an organisation such as CMR North or any of the social workers involved of being responsible for the decision made in court,” states Janse van Rensburg.

Secondly, by law and by the ethical code of the profession, no welfare organisation can publicly discuss the details of what a vulnerable child or person discloses, as this will not only unduly expose the vulnerable but also potentially expose them to further humiliation and abuse. When CMR North and Wilna Stander explained they could not comment, media members argued they could because Megan’s case was already public. In reality, this was not true, as all the details of what Megan disclosed in confidence to all the professionals involved were actually not. “Whilst we can understand why “no comment” is generally negatively construed, there are genuine instances where it is the only sensible response, says Janse van Rensburg. “Just like no medical professional can ever discuss a patient’s condition, a social worker cannot discuss details of any person who has been subject to abuse”.

The Raaths case sparked a public interest that soon led to a full-blast attack from various sources over the next few months following Megan’s first statement to the media. Janse van Rensburg says that, in reality, when people are removed from their families due to abuse, those families will never admit to the abuse either out of fear of being shamed, or out of a fear to be prosecuted. They usually always accuse third parties, which then includes organisations and individuals who had to protect these children. “Because of what we do, we will always be the black sheep in cases like these”, says Janse van Rensburg. Throughout the public storm the organisation had to weather, CMR North maintained its confidence that as soon as justice has taken its course, its integrity would be reinstated, which has since proven to be true. On 5 April, the Constitutional Court, for example, rejected Raath’s appeal to hear “new” evidence to prove his innocence, while no less than nine judges held that his application to appeal his convictions had no reasonable prospects of success.

Janse van Rensburg says damage that has been done to the organisation due to all this is, however, far-reaching and that it will take time to recover. This includes substantial losses of major corporate sponsorships, extensive legal costs and costs that had to be incurred for professional assistance with protecting their reputation, which contributed to the retrenchment of half their staff. This followed shortly on the heels of the Department of Social Development’s withdrawal of its subsidies to CRM North, which formed the greatest part of the organisation’s income. Janse van Rensburg says the gravest injustice that was done however, is the injustice towards the most vulnerable members of our society who depend on them to be their voice.

“We are therefore exceptionally thankful for this the opportunity to contribute to this documentary, as we believe it will help improve the general understanding of the realities that we and our social workers are faced with and create greater awareness about the importance of speaking up on behalf of those who cannot speak for themselves”, Janse van Rensburg concludes. Apart from the rerun this coming Thursday, Swartskaap is now also available on DStv Catch Up.

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