

Used underwear to bring awareness to South Africa's rape epidemic

Two women, 1.2 kilometres of washing line, 3600 pairs of used underwear and one wedding dress made of panties

Two South African artists will hang 3600 pairs of used underwear on 1.2 kilometers of washing line over the streets of downtown Johannesburg to bring awareness to South Africa's rape epidemic and mark the 16 Days of Activism campaign, Amnesty International South Africa said today.

The underwear washing line display will be strung between Fox, Albrecht and Kruger Streets and end in the SoMa Art + Space Gallery as part of an exhibition between 25 November and 4 December.

The artists, Jenny Nijenhuis and Nondumiso Msimanga are collaborating on the public art installation with SoMa – which will include a performance art piece by Msimanga in a wedding dress made of panties – in order to make rape a difficult-to-ignore discussion.

"Rape is the unappealing underwear that doesn't get hung outside. Whenever its grime is made public by women like Khwezi – or even the brave Remember Khwezi protesters – it is silenced by the invisible shroud of shame," says Nijenhuis.

The two women, both survivors of sexual abuse, were distressed by the many stories they were reading about those accused of rape going unpunished. But upon investigation on the matter, they uncovered that even the experts on rape in South Africa were confused by muddled reporting systems which made incidents of rape difficult to quantify.

It was one statistic that stood starkly back at them; a 2010 study by the Medical Research Council found that just one person in 25 in Gauteng reported rape. Extrapolated from crime figures at the time, it could have meant that up to 3600 people in South Africa could be raped per day. Their perpetrators rarely faced the law, and Nijenhuis and Msimanga were just another one of South Africa's horrific statistics.

The pair is calling on the public to donate underwear for the installation. Underwear is being collected at various drop-off points that can be found on www.sasdirtylaundry.co.za. The project is also asking for new underwear which will be

given to various rape crisis organisations in survivor care packs.

Along with the installation, various activism events will take place in the streets of the Maboneng precinct from November 25 until December 4. An open call has been put out to other artists who want to share their stories of rape through different artistic forms culminating in the exhibition at SoMa, *The Things We Do For Love*.

Amnesty International South Africa has greatly contributed to the realization of this project in providing the financial resources needed for the construction of the installation along with the mobilization of its members in supporting the exhibition launch and other activities. Other partners include the Mail & Guardian, Big Fish School of Filmmaking, Genepool IT Solutions, Kargo Freight, POWA, the Gender Equity Office at the University of the Witwatersrand, Drama for Life, Furnlock and Slide, the Maboneng Precinct, Foto First, Zeno Petersen and Women for Afrika.

For more information about underwear donation points or the artist callout, please go to www.sasdirtylaundry.co.za