

CAPE POINTS

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Committee stalling on DNA bill that would save lives

THE BRUTAL attack and murder of yet another innocent young South African girl brings to mind the evocative words of Chris Asplen, an international DNA expert who, after visiting our country, wrote an article in *The Star* in June 2011. Asplen has helped more than 35 countries realise the potential of DNA technology to ensure justice for the victims of rape, mostly women and children. In that article, he highlighted the fact that the most important factor influencing the potential effect of DNA in any criminal justice system is what the law allows you to do with it. And nowhere is that dynamic more tragically clear than in South Africa.

At that time, Asplen bemoaned that the politicians in the South African Parliament had, 10 years since his first visit to our country, still failed to give police the legal authority to serve justice in literally thousands upon thousands of cases with DNA. Make that 12 years later, and Asplen would be horrified to learn that South Africa has still not, in contrast with more than 50 countries around the world, passed the DNA Bill which would allow for the establishment of a forensic DNA database.

Reading that article now, his words are chilling in the wake of last week's rape, mutilation and murder of Anene Booysen, 17. He says: "As someone who works regularly in other people's countries, I don't 'call out' or criticise foreign officials easily or often. But on a scale unequalled anywhere else on Earth, hundreds of thousands of children's lives are sacrificed because of the failure to act by politicians in South Africa."

"The parliamentary portfolio committee responsible for the legislation that would give police the ability to immediately begin taking rapists off the street has avoided acting on the law for years. "The legislation sits in committee while the worst sexual violence statistics in the world keep growing. Except they are not really statistics. They are terrified women and girls facing horrific violence and possible HIV contamination. It's happened to three more of them just in the time it took you to read this article," Asplen says.

The DNA Project, a non-profit organisation, has been fighting tirelessly for the implementation of the DNA Bill for four years. What is worse is that a perfectly good draft DNA Bill, which has been extensively reviewed, debated, translated, made into policy and reviewed again, is waiting in the wings of Parliament to be adopted by the cabinet, to be reviewed, again, by the portfolio committee

on police before it can be passed. But, without any political will to ensure that this legislation is promulgated, who knows how many more years Asplen will lament on this tragic state of affairs. It is accepted worldwide that when it comes to fighting back against serial rapists, there is nothing better at getting perpetrators off the street, at protecting young girls from rape, than DNA databases.

So, why are we not doing it here? Because we don't yet have the laws giving give us the power to fight back. In the meantime, convicted offenders continue to be released without having their DNA profiles taken and entered into the DNA database, suspects of violent crimes are not routinely profiled, because it is not mandatory to do so, and our existing database is hampered by the fact that it cannot be used as a criminal intelligence tool because we do not have the legislation to allow us

to expand the DNA database for this purpose. With our high rate of recidivism in South Africa, we are wasting a valuable opportunity to identify repeat offenders at an early stage and get them off the streets, and sadly, it is costing people their lives.

What compounds this tragedy further is that we have the necessary infrastructure to leverage the power of DNA technology in South Africa. What more excuses do we need to hear? How many more graves do we need to dig? There is nowhere else to place the wreath of responsibility than around the necks of our politicians who are preventing this critical bill from being enacted.

Let's hope they don't have to place a wreath on the grave of their daughter or loved one to move them into action. **VANESSA LYNCH** Executive Director

The DNA Project

No reply to high rates challenge

MORE than two years ago, I formally objected to the property rates of R4 733.34 charged on my property, since it was more than double that of our neighbours. The city did not deign to reply. I find that highly unprofessional, and ought to be a source of shame. When we came to live here five years ago, from the Netherlands, we expected this to be a state where the law ruled. We have doubts now.

TOM MEYER Camps Bay

Alderman Ian Neilson, executive deputy mayor and mayoral committee member for finance, replies: "The city would like to clarify Mr Meyer's misunderstanding of the general valuation process. After consulting records on the system,

the following has been ascertained: In 2009, an objection was lodged against the value of the property in question, as assessed in that year's general valuation process. The objection was resolved and the municipal valuer's original assessment was lowered. The objection decision notice was posted in June 2010, and included in that was information on lodging an appeal, should the property owner still disagree with the decision. No appeal was received and the appeal period has expired. There is also no record on the system of the letter to which Mr Meyer refers. The city would like to remind Mr Meyer, and all homeowners, that when objecting to a decision made by the municipal valuer, it is very important that objections be submitted using the correct channels, to avoid situations just like this one.

In this instance, Mr Meyer may write to the chairperson of the Valuation Appeal Board, explaining why an objection was not lodged within the prescribed period and request that a late appeal be condoned. The communication to the chairperson should also explain why the valuation is perceived to be wrong. The Valuation Appeal Board is an external board not overseen by the City of Cape Town. New property valuations will be posted to all owners over the next two weeks. Owners are reminded that objections must be lodged by the April 30.

Simple answer to cable theft

I AM tired of the likes of Telkom and Eskom crying about what cable theft costs them. I know it's a big problem but it's not a big problem in other countries like the US and UK and countries where the police and law enforcement authorities do their job properly. I think it's time to say no scrap dealer can purchase scrap copper for cash, and that they must get the details of anyone attempting to sell it. In primary school language; if they can't sell it, they won't steal it. How simple is that?

BEBBY G B Cape Town

Sightseeing too pricey for locals

WITH my birthday approaching, I was contemplating taking advantage of the free cable car birthday offer - but, since I wouldn't want to go on my own, the high cost of taking anyone else makes it virtually impossible. The outrageously high prices of sightseeing in Cape Town are alarming and I shudder when I think of the many poor people in our communities who will never get a glimpse of these places. Our attractions should be more accessible and affordable for poor and struggling locals. **BAHIYYAH ADAMS**



It's time to create a better society

IN FRIDAY'S Argus you rightly ask the question: "Where is the outrage?" This is the question I have been asking myself and those around me as well.

In India the brutal gang rape and subsequent death of a 22-year-old woman in December sparked a huge public outcry and demonstrations, prompt arrests of suspects, fast-tracked court appearances and prompted the Indian government to dramatically tighten its laws on sexual assaults and crimes against

women. In South Africa, which has the highest incidence of rape in the world, the recent gang rape and subsequent death of a 17-year-old woman, has been met with mostly silence and indifference, and will probably not lead to any of the actions that we have seen in India. It is tragic that we in South Africa are so used to hearing of the rape and killing of women and children that this 17-year-old woman becomes just another statistic to be forgotten when the next incident happens. We as a country achieved our political freedom in 1994, but women and children are still not free. There is a war being waged against us. Every time we go out, we have to be constantly alert to the possibility that we may be mugged, stabbed, raped or killed - on the way to school, work or just going out. We are not even safe in

our own homes. In many cases the perpetrators are in our homes - someone's father, husband, boyfriend, son.

I'm not saying all men are guilty of this: I know a lot of good men. But we are all guilty of allowing this to happen. We need to do more to create a better society for all of us to live in. And by better society I don't mean more material things for everyone. I mean a more caring society.

I mean teaching boys to respect girls as their equals. I mean holding people accountable for what they say and do.

I mean a government that makes people's wellbeing their first priority and treats people with respect and dignity. We could all rally against apartheid, why can't we rally against violence in this country? **ANITA SHAW**