Committee stalling on DNA bill would save lives

THE BRUTAL attack and murder of yet another innocent young South African girl brings to mind the evocative words of Chris Aspen, an international DNA expert who, after visiting our country, wrote an article in The Star in June 2011.

Aspen has helped more than 35 countries revisit 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 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.

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In 2011, Aspen bemoaned that the politicians in the South African government were not properly engaging with the DNA experts and that the system was failing to do justice.

Make that 12 years later, and Aspen would be horrified to learn that South Africa still has not, in contrast with more than 30 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 brutal gang rape 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 unparalleled 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 DNA samples would have had its last meeting in 2012 and the First Reading of the draft DNA Bill has been avoided acting on the law for years.

“The legislation sits in committee while South Africa’s violent crime statistics in the world keep growing. Except they are not really statistics. They are statistics of women and girls facing horrific violence and possible HIV contamination. It’s happened to thousands of people, just in time it took you to read this article,” Aspen says.

This week, the 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 to expand the DNA database for this purpose.

With our high rate of documented rape 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 excess do we need to hear? How many more graves do we need to dig?

There is nowhere else to place the wrath 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.

VRENITRIA VYVINGH
Executive Director
The DNA Project

No reply to high rates challenge

MORE than two years ago, I formally objected to the property rate 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 MAYER
Camps Bay

Alderman Ian Nelson, executive deputy mayor and mayoral committee member for finance, replies:

The city would like to remind Mr Mayer of the fact that objections to a decision made by the municipal valuation, it is very important that objections be submitted using the correct channels, to avoid situations just like this one.

In this instance, Mr Mayer 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 considered. The communication to the chairperson should also explain why the valuation is considered to be wrong. The Valuation Appeal Board is an external board not owned by the City of Cape Town.

New property valuations will be posted to all owners over the next 10 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 countries where the police and law enforcement authorities do their job and we see the occasional news story to say a 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 difficult is that?

REEBY G E
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 didn’t want to go on my own, the high cost of taxis makes it virtually impossible.

The outrageously high prices of sightseeing and tour operators are alarming and I wonder whether I am the only person in my corner of the world who gets a glimpse of these places. Our attractions should be more accessible and affordable for poor and struggling locals.

BHATTIYAH ADAMS