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TAC and FOTAC UK endorse statement by Sonke Gender Justice Network condemning comments made by Julius Malema

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The Treatment Action Campaign and Friends of TAC (FOTAC) UK strongly endorse the following statement released yesterday by Sonke Gender Justice Network condemning recent offensive, sexist comments made by ANC Youth League President Julius Malema:

Sonke Gender Justice Network Strongly Condemns Comments Made by Julius Malema, ANC Youth League Leader:

Cape Town/Johannesburg, 28 January 2009: The Sonke Gender Justice Network is deeply disturbed by the sexist comments made last week by ANC Youth League president Julius Malema and by the failure of the ANC to sanction him.

Last week, at a meeting with 150 Cape Peninsula University of Technology students on January 22, Malema suggested that the woman who accused ANC president Jacob Zuma of rape had a "nice time" with him and said, "when a woman didn't enjoy it, she leaves early in the morning. Those who had a nice time will wait until the sun comes out, request breakfast and ask for taxi money.?

South Africa has amongst the highest rates of domestic and sexual violence of any country in the world and an AIDS epidemic that is inextricably linked to men?s power over women. Our still very low conviction rates for rape and domestic violence do little to deter this violence; the failure of our courts to hold perpetrators accountable all too often sends perpetrators a message that they can assault women with impunity. In this context our leaders have a critical role to play in ending gender based violence.

Malema?s comments, however, contribute to a culture of violence and represent a setback to gender equality in South Africa; they trivialise women?s frequent experience of being blamed for rape or being treated with disregard by our police, courts and clinics and they demonstrate contempt for the thousands of women who experience rape in

to play an active role in preventing domestic and sexual violence.

Malema?s derogatory statements are consistent with the many disparaging comments the ANCYL leader has made in the recent past and represent an alarming pattern of undermining South Africa?s commitment to human rights and gender equality as articulated in our Constitution.

Leaders of our political parties are expected to serve as public role models and defenders of justice, equality and human rights. In this instance, however, a senior leader of the ANC has made public remarks that display contempt for women?s widespread experience of indifference and discrimination in the wake of sexual and domestic violence.

Sonke calls on the ANC leadership to set the record straight by sanctioning Malema and by demonstrating unequivocally their commitment to gender equality and to preventing gender based violence as spelt out in ANC and government policies.

Sonke recognises that the majority of South African men do not use violence against women and calls on all men--especially those active in the One Man Can Campaign--to speak out against men's violence against women whenever it occurs. Like many other men across the country, the men involved in the One Man Can Campaign are proud of our country?s commitment to achieving gender equality. We work in communities across the country to encourage men and boys to take active stands to end violence against women. We encourage other men to act on their convictions that violence against women is wrong and extend an invitation to join the One Man Can Campaign by calling 011 339-3589 by emailing info@genderjustice.org.za or by visiting the Sonke website at www.genderjustice.org.za.

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