

**EDITORS/REPORTERS**

**26 June 2019**

**SUBJECT: MEDIA STATEMENT ISSUED BY THE CRL RIGHTS COMMISSION  
ON THE UPDATE ON INITIATION MATTERS IN THE GAUTENT PROVINCE**

**A. Background and Context**

Male initiation is traditionally used as a transitional rite of passage from ‘boyhood to manhood’. Despite this traditionally important role, male initiation continues to generate a public outcry. The public hearings on initiation schools conducted by the CRL Rights Commission came amid nationwide reports and concerns prompted by the rising number of deaths, gangsters, beatings, ill treatments and the various health risks to which initiates are exposed at initiation schools in certain parts of the country.

The recurring numbers of hospital admissions of initiates, missing minors, deaths, injuries, penile amputations and other related challenges in the past couple of years during initiation seasons was not to be ignored and this crisis warranted an urgent attention by the CRL Rights Commission.

This report noted that, because of the deaths, penile amputations, injuries and fatalities resulting from the practices in some initiation schools, the initiation rite has virtually become a matter of public health.

**B. Findings**

1. The urbanisation phenomenon in the new dispensation meant that people departed their rural homes for the towns and cities, contributing to a collapse in the management of the practice.
2. The traditional role and status of traditional leaders and elders as principals and overseers of initiation schools, especially in urban areas, has either collapsed or declined

3. This collapse or loss of the significance of the traditional authority structures in many communities has led to the assertiveness of young people as important role players when coming to initiation.
4. In this new climate, many young people are finding ways of making money out of the initiation practice.
5. Many of the youth have assumed active roles in many aspects of cultural practices, including the initiation rite, which in some instances, is carried out by inexperienced traditional surgeons and principals.
6. The rise of unemployment and the lack of access to economic participation among young people has also contributed to the proliferation of initiation schools in the urban areas.
7. Some of the schools have become a vehicle for gain.
8. Another disturbing trend is the emergence of touts who go around recruiting and kidnapping potential initiates for a fee.
9. The essence of the practice is being lost along with its cultural value and sacredness.
10. The initiation rite and initiation schools require holistic rather than cosmetic intervention.
11. Inexperienced people are now responsible for setting up these schools
12. Parental consent which is a critical/ethical issue in the initiation rite is violated or ignored
13. The incompetent performance of the circumcision ritual at the initiation schools was singled out as the major cause of penile amputations and initiates' deaths.
14. The laws, by-laws and policies applied in various provinces  
and municipalities regarding initiation and initiation schools differ.
15. Some of the submissions indicated that police interference should

be prompt especially in cases of abductions, assaults, deaths and closing down of unauthorised schools.

16. In some cases drugs, liquor and dangerous weapons are carried around at initiation schools.

### **Social Development**

- Lack of proper nutrition for initiates before, during and after undergoing an initiation school, especially of boys coming from poor families, needs to be looked into.
- The role of the Department of Social Development as per S.12 of the Children's Act, is not clearly understood in most Provinces.

### **Education Department**

- Some initiates, in the Vaal area, have taken over some school toilets and charge all those boys who have not been to the initiation schools a fee to use the toilets.
- Some recruitment happens at schools.
- Some gangs are formed at some schools.

## **C. Recommendations**

1. Communities should set up Traditional Initiation Leadership structures that would oversee initiation schools. Such structures could also serve as support systems and help the police to root out criminality.
2. Practice guidelines should be developed to specify what should and should not be done in establishing an initiation school, including support infrastructure.
3. Traditional surgeons, traditional nurses and principals should be trained, registered and accredited, and their competences be regularly evaluated by a relevant accreditation body.

4. The national legislation should allow age limits to be determined by each Province and each province should there ensure effective and efficient monitoring of these schools
5. The Children Act 38 of 2005 should also be amended as such.
6. Parental/Guardian informed consent for all underage boys should be given in writing before they enter an initiation school.
7. Traditional Councils and Municipalities should register all initiation activities taking place in their area.
8. Department of Social Development should provide food parcels where necessary.
9. Traditional Councils and Municipalities should designate areas where *Ulwaluko/Koma/Lebollo/Mophato* could be set up, taking into cognisance the necessary infrastructure, e.g. security, clean water, cultural sensitivities, etc.
10. Prospective initiates should go through a series of prescribed medical check-ups and immunisation before they undergo initiation.
11. Medical and psycho-social support should be provided to all concerned in case of a botched circumcision, penile amputations or death of an initiate.
12. Further research on penile transplants should be supported by the Department of Health with the aim of main-streaming this service to all young men who had penile amputations.
13. Further research, in partnership with other research institutions and institutions of higher learning, should be done on the issue of female initiation.
14. There should be a special focus on the protection of initiates coming from single female headed households.
15. Suspension of all the initiation related activities in the entire Gauteng Province until the end of December 2018.

For further enquiries contact the Commission

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