

Press Release

For immediate release



SOUTH AFRICAN
INSTITUTE OF
RACE RELATIONS

South Africa's Leading Research and Policy Organisation

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Time for public discussion on families

The South African Institute of Race Relations welcomes the President's statement calling for a national debate on families in South Africa.

On Friday, 24 August 2012, the Presidency issued a statement calling for the strengthening of families in the country. The statement noted challenges facing families, such as poverty, unemployment, teenage pregnancy, unwanted pregnancy, HIV/AIDS, and absent fatherhood. It further called for a dialogue to define and strengthen families as an important social institution.

The statement also quoted research published by the Institute in 2009, showing that a quarter of all children do not live with either of their biological parents. More recent research shows that the trends are getting worse. By 2011, a third of all children were not living with either of their biological parents, and as many as half, or 9 million children, had absent but living fathers.

Lucy Holborn, research manager at the Institute, said, 'Regardless of the President's views on women, the issue he has raised of the prevalence of dysfunctional families is an important one that needs more attention. Research shows that children growing up without both their parents, and particularly without their fathers, tend to fare worse at school, and may be more likely to engage in risky sexual behaviour and crime.'

'The Department of Social Development has begun the process of formulating a national policy on families, to better inform government and other stakeholders on policies that can strengthen and support families. However, in addition to this, we need to consider the role of attitudes, norms, and individual behaviour. We need to start asking questions about why so many fathers do not take responsibility for their children, and why so many people have children outside stable relationships without the financial means to adequately support them. Therefore, the debate instigated by the President's comments could not come a moment too soon.'

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