

PHILADELPHIA DAILY NEWS  
**'Silent' no more, for some**  
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Bodies began to line the pavement in front of the Main Library at Rhodes University as the bells of Grahamstown Cathedral signaled midday on Friday, Aug. 1.

With mouths taped shut, the bodies lay motionless, draped in purple T-shirts to form a mass grave at the center of campus.

The young people who participated in the demonstration against sexual violence would spend the next hour in silence – some as survivors, some in support – each focusing on vicious assaults and the harrowing “afterward” for those who survived.



The demonstration marked the eighth annual Silent Protest, a movement to show support for the estimated 64,000 victims of sexual violence who report their cases to the South African Police Services each year, along with the estimated 400,000 who do not.

Supporters and survivors wore T-shirts to identify their roles in the protest, while others taped their mouths shut to show solidarity with the voiceless. The day culminated with a walk to the Cathedral in the college town in South Africa’s Eastern Cape, where survivors could finally break the silence and share their stories in a safe space.

Over the past eight years, participation in the protest has increased appreciably.

“The first year that this protest happened it was about 70 or 80. Last year, we took it national and the numbers were about 3,400,” said Michelle Solomon, 26, media liaison for Silent Protest.

While giving support to victims of sexual violence, the protest also provides a vehicle for educating the public about stereotypes surrounding rape culture in South Africa.

In South Africa, “more than 80 percent of rape is by someone you know,” said Kim Barker, Silent Protest 2014 coordinator. “We are far less at risk from the stranger in the dark alley

than from the people in your own homes and our partners and our boyfriends. And that is the message that is not getting across.

Realistically the problem of sexual violence in South Africa is as multifaceted as it is monumental.

As it currently exists, Silent Protest does not have the resources to fill the gaps in support for all sexual assault victims.

However, Silent Protest does offer relief to victims by allowing them to share their stories.

“For most of the rape survivors, the Silent Protest has been a positive and beneficial experience,” Barker said. “It hasn’t been easy but they all thought it had moved them forward in terms of recovery.”