

It is a sad reflection on South African society, and a grim warning as to how long a road we still have to travel, that supporters of Jacob Zuma demonstrating outside the Johannesburg High Court on Tuesday burnt photographs of the complainant while chanting "burn the bitch".

It is even sadder that this Neanderthal demonstration, not only of gross misogyny, but also of contempt for the rule of law, came on the eve of International Women's Day – celebrated since 1911 to mark the emancipation of women.

The Zuma trial has brought into sharp focus the appalling rape situation in South Africa. Last year, about 55 000 rapes were reported in this country – but because only one in nine rapes are estimated to be reported, the real rape figure is thought to be closer to 495 000. Equally shocking is that only about 5% of those cases that get to the trial stage, end in convictions.

In this context, it takes tremendous courage for a rape victim firstly to lay charges against her rapist – particularly when he is known to her – and secondly to take the charges to the trial stage, with all its concomitant trauma.

This makes it all the more important that the Criminal Law Bill, which rewrites the law on sexual offences and significantly limits the victimisation of those brave enough to lay rape charges, be fast-tracked through Parliament this session, even if it is a flawed piece of legislation because of its fuzziness on issues of male rape and sodomy.

It is commendable that both the ANC's National Working Committee and the Friends of Jacob Zuma Trust have condemned the burning of images of Zuma's rape accuser, and the vulgar labelling of her as a "bitch". But Zuma himself has been silent – even as his defence team appears to have adopted the strategy of branding his accuser as perhaps having invited his attentions through her dress and actions.

Zuma has comported himself outside the court as a struggle hero and as a victim, not as an accused. He has the constitutional right to be regarded as innocent until found guilty. But surely some expression of disapproval regarding the behaviour of his supporters is called for?



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PRETORIA NEWS

Put a stop to behaviour of Zuma minions

Extract from the Pretoria News of 9 March 2006.

Spectre of Aids at Mandela nuptials

CHARLES MOLELE

AIDS brought former President Nelson Mandela's grandson and his wife to the altar.

Mandla Mandela and his wife Thando hosted high-profile guests, including President Thabo Mbeki, and hundreds of villagers when they tied the knot at one of a series of colourful wedding ceremonies during a two-day celebration at the Mandela homestead at Qunu in the Eastern Cape last weekend.

Speaking at his reception, Mandla, clutching his weeping 27-year-old bride's hand, told the 800 guests that Aids had killed both his and his wife's parents.

"My parents, Makgatho and Joyce Zondi Mandela, died of Aids," said Mandla. "But I also want to tell you that my wife Thando's parents died of the disease as well."

Mandla told the guests that he met Thando at a difficult time in her life.

The couple met five years ago in Johannesburg. In 2002, her 55-year old mother, Yolisa Mabunu, died of Aids-related complications. Two years later her 56-year-old father, Mpumelelo Mabunu, also died of the disease.

"In both cases I was there to support

and comfort her," he said.

The two-day event included a formal wedding ceremony on Saturday, followed by a traditional function for hundreds of local villagers on Sunday.

Traffic on the N2, which passes the homestead's gates, came to a halt as motorists tried to catch a glimpse of the couple or Nelson Mandela.

Thando, who had chosen her three sisters as her bridesmaids, wore a flowing white gown created by Johannesburg designer Andre Croucamp.

Mandla was flanked by his close friend, Craig Moffat, and his three brothers — Andile, Ndaba and Mbuso.

The guests were treated to a meal by Mthatha chef Allen Paul, who prepared a variety of seafood dishes, including crayfish, calamari and prawns. Beef Stroganoff and a spit braai of pork, lamb and chicken were also on the menu.

The couple are expected to find time in their busy schedules to escape on a honeymoon only during the Easter holidays.

Mandla is studying politics at Rhodes University in Grahamstown, and Thando works at South African Airways as a service quality auditor.