

The South African writer and granddaughter of Nelson Mandela, Zoleka Mandela became a road safety activist following the death of her 13-year-old daughter Zenani in a car crash hours after her birthday in 2010. At the forefront of worldwide campaigns for road safety, she believes it is wholly unacceptable that road traffic injuries are the leading killer of young people globally. She is a United Nations Global Ambassador on Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs) and the FIA Foundation's Ambassador for its Child Health Initiative. The Zoleka Mandela Foundation also supports accelerated cancer research and breast cancer awareness.

In your view what is a feminist transport system?

First, I have to say that I am not an expert on feminism – certainly not from an academic point of view. Nor can I claim to be a transportation policy specialist. I am a woman and a mother living in one of Africa's largest cities. I grew up in Johannesburg during Apartheid when we were fighting for our freedom. I've seen my city and country develop so fast. For us, it's been a revolution for society – of democracy and human rights. At the same time there has been massive technological and economic change.

Transportation is a big part of this, and one of the most visible aspects. During Apartheid, we were restricted in how we could move around. Now, in the South Africa of the 21st century, I see how human rights and equality are still impacted through transport. Research published by the FIA Foundation covering my country as well as others has shown alarming levels of harassment and abuse experienced by women in public spaces on a daily basis.

In my view, the biggest and most immediate priority is to ensure that women are safe and secure when we use transport. Our voices must first be heard, then women must be given the opportunity to design transport systems and lead transport policy making; finally, there must be concerted action and investment to put the measures in place that we need in order to move with true freedom. This, after all, is a fundamental human right.

How does the current situation for women and girls in South Africa influence your work?

I have personally experienced the very worst that can happen to women: As a child and young girl, I suffered sexual violence. In my book *When Hope Whispers*, I describe being sexually abused by some of the adults in my life who should have been protecting me. It was an abuse of power and a violation of trust. It was a deep, traumatic humiliation, and it left me scarred emotionally and mentally. It led me to self-harm and to try to take my own life several times.

In my country, the rate of gender-based violence is incredibly high. I must say that honestly, I often feel quite powerless in the face of all the abuse that continues. But I have been fortunate to have the platform to call for action, by campaigning with the FIA Foundation and with the UN on fundamental issues of human rights. The trauma will always be with me, but it also spurs me on to make my voice heard. Currently I am campaigning in the lead-up to the Global Forum for Adolescents linked to the UN's SDG Summit later this year. Issues such as violence against girls, road safety, and safe equitable transportation are major priorities. I would urge everyone to get involved in the #1point8BillionforChange campaign, with which we call on policymakers to make commitments and accelerate action on these priorities.

Zoleka Mandela

ROAD SAFETY ADVOCATE AND FOUNDER OF
ZOLEKA MANDELA FOUNDATION

SOUTH AFRICA





Who is your feminist role model?

When you have a grandfather like mine, who really changed the world, people often overlook the role played by the women who were around him. In particular, I would point to my grandmother, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela. I was incredibly close to my grandmother; she was my rock during some of the most difficult times in my life. To say my grandmother was strong is an understatement. She was a leader and a fighter but the love she had for her children and grandchildren was limitless. She was at the forefront of the struggle for freedom, but really, she was not recognized as a mother of the nation until she died. She was so dear to my heart and her strength continues to be an inspiration to me.

Do you have any advice for other people who want to be part of a feminist reshaping of their communities and transport system?

My advice is simple: Be true to yourself and tell your story. I have never held back in speaking the truth, however uncomfortable for some people that may be. I won't pretend that it has been easy for me to speak out and to confront the dark moments in my life. It takes courage to stand up, to speak, and to campaign. But I know that for any change to happen, the world must first hear and understand our stories, our experience.