

SAFE TAXIS CHARTER

Preamble:

We constantly hear reports of women experiencing rape and abductions and all manner of abuse when traveling by taxi. While some politicians have denounced this violence, this is not enough. But unless we turn public outrage into real action by our leaders, we will continue to live in fear. Because women and children commuters expect safe, pleasant and reliable commuting in taxis and on any other public transport in South Africa, Soul City in collaboration with other women centred organisations set out to call for contributions from South Africans on how to make the taxi a safe mode of transport for women commuters. This Charter therefore is a collection of those contributions and seeks to outline what should be done.

Identifiability:

Women commuters must be able to tell which taxis are safe even before they board. We therefore call on the Department of Transport and all taxi associations to ensure that;

- Safe Taxis will be easily identifiable. The driver will have been cleared by the Police, trained and certified as “safe”
- All drivers will be registered on a database and carry ID cards displaying their “safety accreditation”
- Every association will have its own uniform. The uniform must be mandatory and it should be a punishable offence not to wear it. This should make it easy for women to identify between real taxis and private cars.

Safety and Security:

The Department of Transport together with all taxi associations operating routes in the country must prioritise women commuters’ safety. To this end;

- All drivers will have a Police clearance.
 - All drivers will be vetted by going through a criminal check. All those with a previous history of sexual offence and gender based violence MUST be removed from the industry.
- All designated ranks will be well lit.
- There will be security officers at the taxi ranks. They will work with a local Police station and assist female commuters at the ranks with any queries.
- Existing route monitoring by taxi associations will be mandatory
- There must be a dedicated toll free/hotline number to report drivers
- Department of Transport will make it mandatory for employers to make available safe transport for workers who knock off late at night or early morning
- All taxis and taxi ranks will be gun free zones

Technology

There must a deliberate leveraging on existing technology to ensure the safety of women using taxis therefore surveillance becomes critical. To this end, government and taxi associations will;

- Invest in an application where taxi users scan drivers ID displayed on the window next to the door before getting in.
- A driver rating application will be explored and used to score drivers.
- Ensure that taxis install CCTV cameras on all taxis as a prerequisite to operate and these must be monitored by an independent centre that will feed to a Police station
- The administrators can monitor taxis remotely and take action when any accident/incident happens. The video footage can also be used as evidence in cases of criminal action.
- No taxi should go off-route. If they take a wrong route the central technical team must call to check why and where the driver is going.

Recruitment and driver development

- All drivers to be hired must be registered with their Taxi association.
- To check all drivers against the Sexual Offences register.
- To open up the industry and create an environment that is welcoming for female Taxi drivers.
- Taxi drivers and owners will be sensitized on gender-based violence and encouraged to protect women and children.
- After conducting successful trainings on customer services, basic life skills and Gender Based Violence. Taxi operators will be issued with a certificate and will have personalised stickers put on their taxis as an indication that they are against abuse of women and children.

Accountability and awareness

- Taxi associations will take greater responsibility in holding driver/owners accountable to safe practices
- There will be billboards at taxi ranks focusing on rape, harassment and law enforcement.
- The Department of Transport will work closely with the Department of Justice and Community safety in publicising at taxi ranks, the names of all drivers/owners who have been found guilty and sentenced in a court of law.
- Taxi Associations to ensure all taxis display complaints hotline information.

- Taxi Associations to produce monthly reports on how they are handling customer complaints.

Regulation and law enforcement

The Department of Transport in conjunction with law enforcement agencies must:

- Remove all unlicensed, uncertified taxis masquerading as “safe taxis” on the road.
- Together with Taxi Associations, monitor taxi routes to ensure that only taxis permitted to operate in any particular route do so to avoid taxi violence.
- Beef up more police to do radical taxi searches targeting various lawlessness.
- There will be harsher sentences to taxi operators who do not comply with set regulations with withdrawals of PDPs and route permits

While we recognise that we expect all of this from taxi operators/drivers/owners, we equally call on commuters to;

- Treat drivers with respect.
- Not behave in an inappropriate manner or provoke drivers
- Comply with the law