

# Dialogue aims to bring child killings to end

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THERE'S been a groundswell of anger in the wake of Courtney Pieters's death. The three-year-old, whose body was found in a shallow grave near her Elsie's River home last week, will be laid to rest today. There had been a nine-day long search for her.

Family friend and tenant, 40-year-old Mortimer Saunders, has been formally charged with Courtney's rape and murder.

The Mandela Initiative announced it will host an action dialogue in Cape Town. The twoday event which starts on Monday, will see academics, members of civil society as well as government representatives take part in the discussion. The plan is for them to identify key priorities to reduce violence against children in the country, and break the intergenerational cycle of violence.

The hope is that the dialogue will go some way towards ensuring responsive child protection and child violence prevention services.

President Jacob Zuma, who visited the Pieters home on Thursday, added his voice to those angry with the increase in attacks on women and children. Zuma was particularly critical of the Elsie's River police's handling of the investigation into Courtney's disappearance, saying; "When police were first asked to help, they treated the mother as the perpetrator, instead of helping with the search."

Minister of Police Fikile Mbalula announced the opening of a new satellite station for the area from Thursday after community members complained of a slow reaction time from police.

"The community has been terrorised for years. We cannot allow our people to live in a hopeless situation. They need hope, they need progress," Mbalula said.

It's been a turbulent week for residents of Elsie's River.

Deputy chairperson of the community policing forum Imraahn Mukaddam resigned, citing "police bungling" of Courtney's case.

There had been a large-scale search for her, involving members of various community neighbourhood watches. Her body was found in Bofors Circle, Epping, last Saturday, less than 1km from her home.

An emotional Mukaddam said: "I've been on a roller-coaster for the last two weeks and I just got to a point where, after Courtney's body was discovered and the perpetrator was now found, the fact that I had seen him search for the child... show remorse – that just got to me..."

Nineteen children have been killed since the start of this year according to Western Cape NPA spokesperson Eric Ntabazalila. Saunders is due to appear in court on Wednesday.