The use of corporal punishment as a means of maintaining control was introduced into African societies by missionaries and colonialism. It was entrenched in South African law during the apartheid era, and was deliberately used to strengthen that system.

In contrast, proverbs in African languages make questionable, for South Africans, the claim that hitting children “is part of my culture”:

- Imbeko anakhiwa ngoswazi – respect doesn’t get built through a stick
- Induku ayinamzi – beatings don’t build a home
- Umntana akakhuliswa ngoswazi – you don’t raise a child with a stick
- Nhonga a yi aki mut – you cannot raise a family with a stick

Corporal punishment is also incompatible with the concept of ubuntu. Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu has said of this uniquely African worldview: “Ubuntu is very difficult to render into a Western language…It is to say – ‘my humanity is caught up, is inextricably bound up, in yours’…” It has been variously defined as humanness, humanity, virtue, goodness and kindness.

References
In the past, slave owners said that they had the right to beat their slaves; the police and courts said it was their right to beat prisoners; and husbands have said they have the right to beat their wives. The fact that parents say it is their right to beat their children must be challenged. It is of great concern that children, who are physically and emotionally the most vulnerable members of society, are last in line to have this fundamental human right protected.

Five African countries have now banned all forms of corporal punishment: Kenya, Tunisia, South Sudan, Togo and the Democratic Republic of the Congo. In addition, campaigns for prohibition are ongoing in Tanzania, Angola and South Africa, among others. Child rights defenders across Africa have committed to a prohibition of all forms of corporal punishment of children and the promotion of positive parenting and support for parents.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child has recommended that all African states prohibit all forms of corporal punishment, including by parents.

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5 For detailed information of global progress towards prohibition, see www.endcorporalpunishment.org/pages/frame.html.