A world without violence against women is possible!

Domestic Violence Act Coalition Joint Press Statement: 2019 16 Days of Activism Campaign

19th November 2019:

We are gathered here today to amplify the voice of women, to call upon individuals, communities, employers and the government of Uganda to take action against sexual harassment in the workplace - informal or formal, big or small, public or private. Eliminating sexual harassment means upholding women’s safety, respect and dignity at work.

Every November 25th to December 10th, activists, individuals and organizations around the world are united by the 16 days of activism campaign to call for the elimination of all forms of gender-based violence against women. During this time, we also strengthen our work around violence against women, re-establish links between local and international networks, develop a forum to share new effective strategies, demonstrate solidarity of women organizing and call on our governments to implement their commitments to eliminate violence against women.

Building on our 2018 campaign, this year’s regional Gender Based Violence (GBV) Network theme is “How does your workplace uphold RESPECT, DIGNITY AND SAFETY FOR WOMEN? Everyone has a RIGHT TO A SEXUAL HARASSMENT-FREE workplace”. This theme is in line with the International theme “Ending Gender Based Violence in the world of work”. Our primary goal this year is to mobilize women across the labour and women’s rights movement to nudge the government of Uganda to ratify and implement the newly adopted International Labour Organization (ILO) instruments; the Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (C190) and the Violence and Harassment Recommendation, 2019 (R206) adopted on 21st June 2019 at the 108th ILO meeting in Geneva. The implementation of these instruments should be expedited through adopting these comprehensive protective measures against violence and harassment in the workplace into the pending amendment of the Employment Act Amendment Bill and passing the same into law with immediate effect! Domesticating these instruments will create an enabling environment, to address the rampant but silent epidemic of sexual harassment at the workplace in Uganda today—that is crippling women’s productivity and contribution to the Ugandan economy. As women workers we demand for a working environment, where we will feel safe, respected and dignified!

We are also cognizant of the National theme “Orange the world #Hear me too: Ending Violence Against Women and Girls and thus join government efforts to call everyone to action because Violence Against Women and Girls remains highly pervasive and persistent in Uganda, despite a progressive legal and policy regime. Harmful practices such as child marriages, commercial sex exploitation of girls and female genital mutilation continue to prevail. Forty percent of girls in Uganda are married off before the age of 18 and 1 in 10 is married before the age of 15. Violence against women remains a persistent crime in our communities as indicated in the 2018 Uganda Police Force Annual Crime Report which highlights that; 15,366 defilement cases were reported in 2018 compared to 14,985 cases in 2017, 1,580 cases of rape were reported in 2018 compared to 1,335 cases in 2017. A total of 286 cases of trafficking in persons were reported, majority of the victims were women. Domestic violence was also among the leading crimes of 2018 with 13,916 cases reported.

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It is also important to continue addressing the social norms that perpetuate gender inequalities and power imbalances between men and women and the community's silence about violence against women and sexual harassment. So many women continue to suffer in silence because of the fear for their safety and the shame and stigma that they face when they speak out. The 2016 UDHS report indicated that 51% of women do not seek help or tell anyone about the domestic violence they experience. The situation is the same for women workers who face immeasurable, unreported, unaddressed sexual harassment-exacerbated by economic vulnerability, high levels of unemployment and poverty in Uganda today.

Critical to eliminating violence against women is allocation of funds for the implementation of the existing laws and policies such as the Domestic Violence Act, the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act and the Prevention of trafficking in Persons Act, the National Policy on elimination of GBV, the Gender Policy, etc. The need to pass the pending bills that address violence against women: The Sexual offences Bill, the Marriage and Divorce Bill, the Succession Amendment bill, the Employment Act Amendment Bill and the Legal Aid bill cannot be overemphasized. The cost of inaction is too heavy for Uganda, as the country continues to lose over 77 billion shillings annually in lost profits and expenses related to gender based violence (2012 CEDOVIP Report). Violence against women remains a major public health concern, a key driver of new HIV infections, a human rights violation and a social economic development barrier.

The time to act is Now!

As the Domestic Violence Act Coalition, we call for action and demand that;

**For the Government:**
1. The MoGLSD initiates the process for the ratification of ILO C190 with immediate effect
2. The Cabinet ratifies ILO C190 to make the standards on eliminating violence and harassment in the workplace a reality in the lives of women workers in Uganda.
3. The MoGLSD, Ministry of Justice and Constitutional Affairs adopt the standards set out in the ILO C190 and R 206 into the Employment Act Amendment Bill.

**For Parliament**
4. Expedite the passing of the Employment Act Amendment Bill to mandate all employers to curb violence, discrimination, harassment and exploitation of women at the work place.
5. Expedite the passing of the Marriage and Divorce Bill, the Sexual Offences Bill, the Succession Act Amendment Bill, the Legal Aid Bill, to strengthen response to violence against women and girls.

**For Employers and Trade Unions**
- Integrate the newly adopted standards and underlying principles into their policies, codes of conduct, to keep women safe at the work place.
- Support women in unions to hold employers accountable to using the ILO standards in their own structures thus making them a reality for all women workers

**For Communities and Individuals**
- Speak out against sexual harassment and refrain from behavior that amounts to sexual harassment in the workplace. Support victims to access help/redress.
16 Days of Activism is an opportunity to act towards creating positive change. Get involved!

Members of the Domestic Violence Act Coalition: Action Against violence Uganda • Action Aid Uganda (AAUI) • Action for Development (ACFODE) • Agency for Cooperation and Research in Development –ACORD • Akina Mama waAfrika –AMWA • Anti Domestic Violence Coalition -ADV • Association of women Lawyers in Uganda -FIDA • Care Uganda • Center for Domestic Violence Prevention–CEDOVIP • Center for Women in Governance–CEWO • Health Rights Action Group –HAG • International Solidarity Foundation (ISF) • Kamwokya Christian Caring Community- KCCC • MIFUMI project • Muslim center for Justice and Law • National Association of Women in Uganda- NAWOU • National Bahai Committee for the Advancement of Women -The Bahai Faith • National Union for Disabled People in Uganda- NUDIPU • OXFAM • Plan international • Platform for Labour Action -PLA • Raising voices • School of Women and Gender Studies -MUK • The Association for Rehabilitation and Re- orientation of Women for Development (TERREWODE) • Uganda Media Women Association -UMWA • Uganda Network on Law, HIV/AIDS and Ethics –UGANET • Uganda Women’s Network –UWONET • Women of Uganda Network –WOUGNET

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