



Domestic Violence Act Coalition Joint Press Statement: 2017 16 Days of Activism Campaign

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign which takes place each year and runs from 25 November, the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, to 10 December, Human Rights Day. It was originated by activists at the first Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991 and is coordinated each year by the Center for Women's Global Leadership. It is used as an organizing strategy by individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

This year's National theme is "***From Peace in the Home to Peace in the Nation: Male engagement for the Safety of Women and Girls!*** Over the 16 days period the Domestic Violence Act Coalition will engage the communities under the national and regional theme; ***Every girl counts, what action will you take to keep girls in school?***

The theme highlights the need to focus attention on the retention of girls in schools by highlighting structural discrimination of girls throughout the education system right from the home, the school setting, and government policy that impact girls access to education and their experience. The campaign builds onto global efforts to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education articulated in Sustainable Development Goal 4 and 5(Gender Equality) as well as the commitments by Government of Uganda to ensure universal education for all.

Although education is a fundamental human right and governments have committed to ensuring free and compulsory education for all, girls still find it hard to access and advance into higher levels of education. Girls face the biggest barriers in education including; early marriage, teenage pregnancy unfavorable policies, sexual harassment, rape and defilement, social and gender norms that prevent girls from accessing and completing school.

Currently in Uganda women and girls face violence at alarming rates. Reports indicate that;¹

- 75% of Ugandan girls are sexually abused during their childhood².
- Uganda ranks 16th among 25 countries with 16% of girls married off by the time they are 15 years and 53% by the age of 18.
- 59.6% of women from the age of 15 have ever experienced physical violence.
- 39% of women have experienced sexual violence compared to 11% of men.

¹Uganda Demographic and Health Survey 2011.

² Violence against Children Report: http://raisingvoices.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/downloads/resources/violence_against_children.pdf

- Women who have been physically or sexually abused by their partners are 1.5 times more likely to acquire HIV than women who have not experienced partner violence.
- More than 1 in 5 women aged 15-49 in Uganda experience sexual violence at some point in time, compared to less than 1 in 10 men (UDHS 2016).
- Yet only 42% of reported defilement and rape cases are investigated and arrests made and one in every four files registered by the Office of the Directorate of Public Prosecutions are closed due to lack of evidence.

Violence against women and girls remains epidemically high in Uganda and hinders social and economic development, it prevents girls and women's equal participation at social, economic and political level, it is extremely costly to families, communities and nations, and it is a profound symbol of gender inequality and social injustice. Additionally, it is a public health concern; increases woman and girls risk to poor health and a driver for HIV/AIDS.

Notwithstanding the fact that the Government of Uganda has over the years demonstrated commitment to prevent and respond to VAWG through the development of appropriate legal and policy frameworks (i.e. the Domestic Violence Act 2010, Anti-female Genital Mutilation Act 2010, the Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act of 2009 and the National Policy for the Elimination of Gender Based Violence (GBV), VAWG remains a major obstacle to the empowerment of women. Gaps exist due to limited funding for effective prevention and response efforts, inadequate resourcing of the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development, the Justice Law and Order Sector (JLOS) institutions, and limited capacity of duty bearers and other stakeholders to implement the legal and policy frameworks.

Uganda has adopted the theme **“From Peace in the Home to Peace in the Nation: Male Engagement for the Safety of Women and Girls”** based on the prevalence and high levels of social acceptance for VAWG in Uganda currently at **58% for women and 44% for men**, (UDHS 2011) and a recognition that the prevention, response and elimination of VAWG requires broad community participation and in particular the engagement of men and boys. Involving men and boys as partners to achieve women's empowerment and gender equality is an important component of ending violence against women and girls³. Accountability to women and girls at every level of male involvement efforts is critical to ethical and effective violence against women and girls programming and to securing women and girls' full and equal rights. Without accountability, the danger that men are in charge persists; in this case, of women's rights and well-being, which further undermines women and girls' agency, voice and leadership, thereby reproducing the very inequality that violence against women and girls work is attempting to shift.

We therefore call for action and demand that;

1. **Guarantee every girls' full education to higher level by;**
 - Enacting policies that promote the rights of pregnant girls and keep them in school,
 - As girls go to school eliminate the barriers they face including sexual harassment with in the transport sector, at home and school environment and ensure their safety from kidnap, homicides on their way to school and provide separate toilet facilities for boys and girls.

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The Feminist Perspectives on Addressing Violence against Women and Girls Series is a collection of papers written by COFEM members to articulate concerns and aspirations for the shrinking space for feminist analysis in VAWG efforts in development and humanitarian settings.

- Parents should remove barriers like: marrying off young girls for material gain, provide scholastic materials as well as sanitary towels, reduce the domestic work load on girls to enable them to have more time to concentrate on their education.
2. **Effectively punish parents and teachers who sexually harass** and abuse their children by revoking their teaching licenses.
 3. **Challenge the systems that reinforce negative stereotypes and power imbalances** faced by girls. Ensure the curriculum and text books encourage and portray gender equality.

On male engagement:

4. **Policy makers must promote female-centric and female-led framing of the issue, discourse, strategies and resources.** Violence against women and girls is fundamentally an injustice against women and girls; as such, the central protagonists for this cause must be women and girls.
5. **Male allies must demonstrate good faith and speak out against** the marginalization of women and girls in policy and programs. When there is a genuine critique advanced about women's rights violations, it draws attention of policy makers and perpetrators. Male engagement groups need to dedicate energy and resources to meaningfully challenge these violations and discrimination of women's rights. Accountability should not only be the responsibility of women rights organizations and women's movements but a duty for all.
6. **Feminist VAWG community needs to be clearer, vocal and united** about what we want from the men and boys' community, i.e. to frame what we envisage as effective male involvement that will help advance a women's human rights agenda and accountability.

16 Days of Activism is an opportunity to act towards creating positive change. How will you 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 -ADVC • Association of women Lawyers in Uganda -FIDA • Care Uganda • Center for Domestic Violence Prevention-CEDOVIP • Center for Women in Governance -CEWIGO • 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 –
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