

WOMEN'S DAY 2019: A CALL FOR EQUALITY AND JUSTICE

Impunity for crimes and violations against women emboldening abusers

(For Immediate Release / Kampala, March 8, 2019) – On this International Women's Day, Chapter Four Uganda acknowledges and celebrates the contributions of Ugandan women to the advancement of gender equality and justice in their communities, often at great personal sacrifice. While we celebrate progress achieved, we are cognizant of the many structural inequality obstacles Ugandan women continue to face.

The theme of this year's global celebration is "Think Equal, Build Smart, Innovate for Change." In choosing this theme, the UN has emphasized that innovation by women and girls -- for women and girls -- remains at the heart of our collective efforts to achieve gender equality.

This year, we are all called to focus on innovative ways in which we can all advance gender equality and the empowerment of women, particularly in the areas of social protection systems, access to public services, and sustainable infrastructure.

"At a time when innovation is dominant, shaping and changing the way people live in every part of the world, we have to be intentional about its use to positively impact the lives of women and girls," said Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka, UN Under-Secretary-General and Executive Director of UN Women.

In the Ugandan context, this day holds great significance because it comes against a backdrop of sexist, derogatory, discriminatory treatment and behavior towards women rooted in the age-old ideology of patriarchy—an ideology deeply engrained in the Ugandan society.

Despite the existence of a progressive legal framework on women's rights, the realities of women are far from what is set in the law. Discriminatory practices continue to happen and the perpetrators enjoy impunity for the crimes. Although it is a systemic problem, it is concerning that many violations against girls and women remain unresolved. Victims, survivors, and their families are far too often denied justice and perpetrators remain at large.

The recent "Miss Curvy" pageant which was promoted in way that violates the dignity and threatens bodily autonomy of women, the actions of Major General Kyaligonza and his guards in assaulting and subjecting Sergeant Esther Namaganda to cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment; revenge pornography, cyber violence against women, sexual harassment, and other women's rights violations are a few of the examples of such derogatory treatment.

“The Constitution requires all persons, especially those charged with governance, to respect, uphold, and promote the rights of women, including their right to full and equal dignity. This means that beyond the letter of the law, those who hold power must recognize the full humanity of all women regardless of race, colour, ethnic origin, class, sexual orientation, creed or religion, age, or disability” said Ophelia Kemigisha, Staff Attorney at Chapter Four Uganda.

We remember the forty-seven women who were killed in the 2017-2018 femicides, and other related murders across the country. Their families have never received justice. Criminal justice institutions must do more to bring the perpetrators to justice through established due process. We condemn reports of torture of suspects. Torture is a crime and it does not help to bring perpetrators to justice.

The call for innovative ways in which we can advance gender equality in the Ugandan context should be taken on in all spheres; i.e. not only social-economic aspects but also in regard to civil and political rights.

Chapter Four Uganda shares the UN’s conviction that achieving a gender-equal world requires social innovations that work for both women and men and that leave no one behind. In addition to our legal and advocacy activities to combat gender inequality and discriminatory laws, policies, and practices; we will continue to strategically support women human rights defenders across Uganda to amplify women voices and champion actions aimed at increasing gender equality and justice.

On this International Women’s Day, let us reflect on the Ugandan context, the progress made as well as the setbacks; celebrate acts of courage and determination, and call for bold and ongoing change to benefit communities and countries worldwide.

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