ENUGU STATE TO DOMESTICATE, VIOLENCE AGAINST PERSONS PROHIBITION ACT (VAPP ACT)

Enugu, Sept. 8, 2015: The Attorney General of Enugu State, Hon Mellitus Eze, has promised to facilitate the domestication of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) which was passed by the National Assembly and assented to by former President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan.

The VAPP bill which is aimed at eliminating all forms of violence in private and public life, also seek to prohibit different types of violence, including physical, sexual, psychological, domestic, harmful traditional practices and discrimination against persons. It provided for maximum protection and effective remedies for offenders, commensurate with offences committed.

The Act, which is not gender biased, redefines, encapsulates and criminalizes all forms of sexual abuses which include sexual molestation, rape, and defilement of minors, as well as stalking. The Act is already implemented at the Federal Level and need s to be domesticated in all states of the Federation.

The AG, who spoke to both the officials of Tamar Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Enugu and Women Aid Collective (WACOL) when they paid him a courtesy visit, said that the state Ministry of Justice is passionate and equipped to fight rape in the state.

“I am happy because your organization is also protecting men against sexual violence, because men are also victims of such violence, most often ignored. If this Act has been passed by the NASS, we can gain some insight from them, bearing in mind the peculiarity of our state”, he said.

Hon Eze, who is also the Commissioner for Justice, noted that the state, as a progressive state, would queue into any project that could ensure the safety and wellbeing of the citizens. He said that the incidence of rape of old women witnessed in Opi, Nsukka, in 2012, left a very bad taste in the mouth of the state, and that perpetrators of such evil act must never be allowed to walk free.

Eze emphasized that any rape case reported to the justice ministry on time would be given the impetus it deserved, noting, however, that the only bottleneck to the prosecution of such cases usually is lack of evidence.

He also reassured the people that his office would abide by the MoU between the state and Tamar SARC in the fight against all forms of sexual violence, saying: “we must keep to our own

Earlier in her brief, the Manager of Tamar SARC, Ms. Nkechi Nwabueze, said that the visit was to draw attention of the ministry to the prevalent cases of assault in the state, solicit collaboration, ensure that the course of justice is served, society deterred from committing such crime and so make the environment safer for all citizens to live in.

She explained that Tamar SARC a one stop Centre that deals with medical treatment and counseling support to all victims of sexual violence collaborated with state Ministries of Justice, Health, and that of Gender
Affairs and Social Development, as with the Enugu State Police Command, with support from the Justice for All (J4A) of the British Department for International Development (DFID) to render the services.

According to her the Centre has so far recorded more than 320 cases of rape and defilement since its establishment in March, 2014. She said that, out of that number, only 27 cases were being prosecuted while one has been successfully convicted serving a jail term of 14 years. She, however, expressed regrets that sexual violence was underreported because victims and families were often reluctant to speak about it. She urged the public to take advantage of the presence of Tamar SARC and report to the Centre within 72 hours of incidents.

Also speaking, the Program Officer of WACOL, Ms. Onyinye Nwachukwu, said that the organization operated in four thematic areas of gender and human rights; democracy and good governance, peace and conflict resolution, and reproductive health and rights.

She appealed to the AG to ensure the domestication of the VAPP Act in Enugu State as it would remove the technical hitches that hitherto impeded prosecution of cases, ensure that men also got justice when they are sexually violated, and to generally reduce the rate of sex-related violence in the society:

The program officer said that the Act criminalized all aspects of sexual assault formerly taken for granted by the public, empowered the police to deal with such cases, and provided a unique and more effective prosecution method.

She said that plans were underway to create a special agency to manage and prosecute all issues related to the VAPP Act.

SARC. “Journey So Far”, gave an insight into the issue of rape, citing some thought provoking cases of sexual abuse in the society so far received by the Centre, which left the lawyers traumatized.

She frowned at the insignificant number of prosecuted cases, carpeting the duo of the police and the Justice system as the bane of the fight against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBVs): “Since the inception of Tamar SARC, only one case has been successfully prosecuted, and the perpetrator got 14 years imprisonment. This may not be much, though, but (it) is a sign that it is possible to get justice for the victims, after all”, the manager said.

Nkechi also said that the major challenge to the conviction of offenders is basically the willingness of victim’s parents to settle out of court which, sometimes, is engineered and facilitated by the law enforcement agencies themselves.

She therefore wanted the advocates to take up this challenge and provide a leeway to the daunting problem. Some of the highly emotional judges, who responded to the presentation, tasked their colleagues to use the opportunity provided by the conference to proffer solutions to the problem. An Enugu High Court Judge, being one of the participants at the conference, Chief Tom Anyafulude, who insisted that rape is a crime against the state, made a passionate appeal to his colleagues to return to their states with a resolve to tackle the menace of rape head on. He also tasked the sponsors of the program, and funder of the J4A center to train selected lawyers from the justice ministries on prosecution of rape cases, because it is unique, and full of technicalities.

Another Lawyer, Jimoh Mumini Adebimpe, the Director Public Prosecution, Kwara state Ministry of Justice, advocated a stiffer penalty for rapist to serve as deterrent to others. Jimoh added: “Issues like this should not be left for the J4A alone. All states must replicate SARC in their state because it would help to protect evidences to aid prosecution”. In his own view, Justice Christopher Onyia of Enugu state was however skeptical that stiffer penalty is the antidote to deter rapists “if so, robbery would have stopped, I rather think that lawyers should be more responsible in the discharge of their duties”, he stressed. He said a holistic approach is required in fighting rape, pointing out, for instance, that the key and related ministries, such as gender affairs, are grossly understaffed and ill-skilled to handle such matters. We should look at this thing from a wider perspective, especially regarding removing a victim from the unsafe environment”, he concluded.

Tamar SARC should also do a proper research and come up with recommendations for solutions, and such reports should be handed over to the state government,

Advocates and Judges in Nigeria have been called upon to be committed to the prosecution of rape cases, in order to stem the tide of rape cases in the country.

The Grant Manager of DFID’s Justice for All, Mr. Godwin Odoh, who made this call at a conference of the Nigeria Justice Reform Team (FJRT), noted that the best approach to fight rape was to ensure that any known rapist was sent to the correctional services.

Odoh described as worrisome the rate of unnecessary bail out of perpetrators, without recourse to the crime committed and the feeling of the victims involved.

Earlier, the Centre Manager of Tamar SARC, Miss NkechiNwabueze, who made a presentation titled Tamar SARC: “Journey So Far” gave an insight into the issue of rape, citing some thought provoking cases of sexual abuse in the society so far received by the Centre, which left the lawyers traumatized.

She frowned at the insignificant number of prosecuted cases, carpeting the duo of the police and the Justice system as the bane of the fight against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBVs): “Since the inception of Tamar SARC, only one case has been successfully prosecuted, and the perpetrator got 14 years imprisonment. This may not be much, though, but (it) is a sign that it is possible to get justice for the victims, after all”, the manager said.

Nkechi also said that the major challenge to the conviction of offenders is basically the willingness of victim’s parents to settle out of court which, sometimes, is engineered and facilitated by the law enforcement agencies themselves.

She therefore wanted the advocates to take up this challenge and provide a leeway to the daunting problem. Some of the highly emotional judges, who responded to the presentation, tasked their colleagues to use the opportunity provided by the conference to proffer solutions to the problem. An Enugu High Court Judge, being one of the participants at the conference, Chief Tom Anyafulude, who insisted that rape is a crime against the state, made a passionate appeal to his colleagues to return to their states with a resolve to tackle the menace of rape head on. He also tasked the sponsors of the program, and funder of the J4A center to train selected lawyers from the justice ministries on prosecution of rape cases, because it is unique, and full of technicalities.

Another Lawyer, Jimoh Mumini Adebimpe, the Director Public Prosecution, Kwara state Ministry of Justice, advocated a stiffer penalty for rapist to serve as deterrent to others. Jimoh added: “issues like this should not be left for the J4A alone. All states must replicate SARC in their state because it would help to protect evidences to aid prosecution”. In his own view, Justice Christopher Onyia of Enugu state was however skeptical that stiffer penalty is the antidote to deter rapists “if so, robbery would have stopped, I rather think that lawyers should be more responsible in the discharge of their duties”, he stressed. He said a holistic approach is required in fighting rape, pointing out, for instance, that the key and related ministries, such as gender affairs, are grossly understaffed and ill-skilled to handle such matters. We should look at this thing from a wider perspective, especially regarding removing a victim from the unsafe environment”, he concluded.

Tamar SARC should also do a proper research and come up with recommendations for solutions, and such reports should be handed over to the state government,
while copies should be sending to the NJRT. This is to enable us carry out advocacy”, Onyia advised.

Mrs. Chinelo Iriele, the Assistant Director, Federal Ministry of Justice, and President, Global Association of Female Attorneys, frowned at the issue of constant withdrawal of case related to rape in courts, adding that rape should be made non-withdrawal by the courts, especially when a minor is involved:

“We need a practical direction on the matter, and we must fight the menace of rape the way the present government is fighting corruption, and the social welfare offices should show more seriousness towards handling of rape cases, she alleged, advising the government to either scrap that department or equip it to serve the people” she emphasized.

The Department for International Development, (DFID) funded project Sexual Assault Referral Centre, Tamar (SARC), Enugu, South East Nigeria has established a Media Against Sexual Violence Network (MASVN) to public Tamar SARC activities, create partnership between the media organizations, and ultimately create awareness on the issue of Sexual and Gender Based Violence(SGBVs) in the state.

The network was set up to help increase media courage on the rape issue and on Tamar SARC activities, establish partnership between the media organizations and the Center, as well as to keep the media up to date with the status and trend of the rape in the society.

The Network, which is the first of its kind in the country, has taken the bull by the horn in the realization of it goals, through the relentless and unconditional publishing of stories, articles and activities of Tamar SARC. The team, made up of seasoned journalists meticulously selected from media organizations around the state, based on their records of passion for promoting social issues mostly issues concerning women and children.

As at press time, over 50 stories, including radio and TV live programs, feature programs as well also has been facilitated by the MASVN. Apart from the publications, they have participated in different sensitization programs embarked upon by the organization as part of it awareness-creation drive. The group was very key to Tamar SARC roadshow held in December, 2015 to mark the UN day of Elimination of Violence against Women amongst other activities. Members of the group included Mrs. Maureen Atuonwu of News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), Mr. Newton Barabara, of Newton Barabara Studios, as well as TuviaEze of Solid FM.

Other members are Mr. Jude Ogbu of Crimewatch, FRCN, Ferdinand Agu of African Independent Television, Juliet Anazie of Dream FM, Ignatus Okara of African Examiner, Chibota Edozie of National Light Newspaper, and Petrus Obi of Daily Sun newspapers, Jude Osai Nigerian Tribune, etc. MASVN meets to review their activities and adopt new ones, as well as look at available case status and use investigative techniques to project cases of public importance, thus attracting the attention of concerned authorities.

In one of the meeting Nkechi Nwabueze, center manager of Tamar SARC said that her biggest battle neck in seeking justice for victims is unwillingness from the parents.

`` Parents of victims often chicken out, this is our biggest challenge we cannot proceed with the cases if parents retrets, so the society must be aware that unless we send pedophiles to jail to serve as a deterrent to others the impunity may continue because most rapist are unrepentant” she stressed.

Nkachi noted that the media and the general public owed it as a duty to the society to protect the children, and youths by frequently reporting sexual violence, and its consequences.

In another meeting of the group, its communication officer Egodi Igwe, updated the meeting on the current statistics as it relates to the records at the Center. She also emphasized some cases that are facing challenges and enjoined the journalists to make further investigations and publications, so as to draw the attention of the concerned authorities to them.

Also speaking at the media network, the Behavioral Change Officer at Path2, Mr. George Eki, said that the society needs champions of change, and urged the media to take the lead in the battle against SGBVs, by effectively reporting rape cases.

In her own reaction, Mrs. Maureen Atuonwu, a
Deputy Editor with the News Agency of Nigeria (NAN), was full of commendation for the Center. She however tasked them to always ensure that they send press releases to members of the group.

Another stakeholder, Mr. Newton Barabara, in his own view, wanted the private sector to come on board by sponsoring some sensitization campaigns aimed at fighting the rising incidences of sexual deviance in the society, as part of their social responsibility.

Members of the media also pledged their technical and moral support in ensuring that the fight against all forms of sexual violence is strengthened.

---

Enugu, August 2015: The Founding Director of Women’s Aid Collective (WACOL)/Tamar SARC has paid a courtesy visit to the newly appointed Commissioner for Health, Enugu state, Hon. Sam Ngwu, to brief him on Tamar Sexual Assault Referral Center, Tamar (SARC).

The aim of the visit, according to her, was to congratulate the new commissioner, and to brief him on the activities of Tamar SARC since his ministry is one of the key partners of the Center.

Joy Ezeilo, who is a former UN rapporteur on human trafficking, took the Commissioner through the day to day activities of the Center, the relationships/linkages with other ministries and agencies, success recorded, as well as the numerous challenges that confront the Center.

The ED, also a lecturer in the Faculty of Law, UNN, brought to the fore the existence of a steering group, a decision-making body made up of leaders of the Enugu state ministries of Health, Justice, Gender Affairs and Social Development, as well as the Enugu state Police Command. These are the different agencies that formed the alliance in fighting rape. She noted that a memorandum of understanding had already been signed by these ministries. Ezeijo made further explanation on the strategic group’s quarterly meeting, where the Center briefed all the partners on its activities, and enjoined the Commissioner to endeavor to attend.

The ED invited the Commissioner to visit the Center to see for himself how the Center operated. She also informed him about the international donor DFID, J4A’s plan to exit, wherefrom the state government was expected to sustain it. She also informed him about the visit of the wife of the Governor of Enugu State to the Centre, Mrs. Monica Ugwuanyi who appreciated the work of the Centre and requested a proposal from SARC for support.

In his reaction, the Commissioner for Health, Hon. Ngwu, commended Tamar SARC for doing a good job. He said that he was passionate about issues like rape and promised to do his best in ensuring that the objectives were realized.

---

**Executive Director WACOL/Tamar SARC pays a Courtesy Call to New Commissioner for Health Enugu state**

**Executive Director**
Joy Ngozi Ezeilo, Ph.D, OON

**Centre Manager**
Ms. Nkechi Nwabueze

**Regional Coordinator (J4A)**
Mrs. Josephine Onah

**Communication Officer/Editor**
Egodi Blessing Igwe

**Contact:** 09091333000, 09092777000