



SURVIVOR'S WATCH

OCTOBER 2023

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ABOUT WACOL

WACOL is an independent, non-political, non-governmental and non-profit organization and registered in 2000 as a company limited by guarantee, i.e. as a charitable organization (RC: 388132) with the Corporate Affairs of Commission (CAC), Nigeria. WACOL's vision is democratic society free from violence and abuse, where human rights of all, in particular women and young people, are recognized in law and practice.

Its mission is to assist in the education, social, economic and political development of women and young people through a wide range of services: training, research, advocacy, shelter, free legal and financial aid, intra-familial/ community conflict resolution, and information and library services.

WACOL works throughout Nigeria and beyond. WACOL has established itself as a credible and committed organization whose work is well recognized beyond the shores of Nigeria. It has an observer status with the African Union, African Commission on Human Rights (since 2001) and it also has an NGO Special Consultative status with the United Nations (approved in 2010 by ECOSOC). WACOL is a formidable organization that can boast of institutional capacity for sustainable work in the field of advancing human rights, gender equality, democracy and good governance.

WACOL in general works in four thematic areas, which are gender/human rights, peace advocacy/conflict resolution, democracy/good governance and reproductive health rights. It has also done some work in the area of STEM and climate change.

Editor's Statement

The survivors' watch is a platform created by WACOL to promote a safe space for victims and survivors of Sexual and Gender Based Violence (SGBV) to share their stories without any bias, conflict, intimidation, fear or threat. The survivors' watch seeks to capture the delicate and unique stories of survivors and victims, while empowering them with the strength of anonymity to own their truth and vocalise their lived experiences.

We understand the importance of supporting survivors and victims to tell their story at their

own time, giving them the opportunity to choose what aspect of their

story they wish to share. The survivors watch provides the

community and safe space for survivors and victims to not only express themselves but also trust that they will be respected while inspiring others to own their story and speak their truth.

This newsletter provides useful information about the issues survivors and victims of abuse experience in the society including emerging areas and trends. The survivors' watch further spotlights anti-SGBV tips and information. Discourse in the survivors' watch negates harmful bias/stereotypes, and promotes healthy practices to enable a safe environment for women and girls to flourish.



Prof Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (SAN, OON)
Executive Director of WACOL


OBINNA BANKS

TECHNOLOGY, LAW, AND DIS(ABILITY): MOVING FROM ISOLATION TO INCLUSION IN NIGERIA

By **Goodness Esemé Ibangah**

In 2022, The World Health Organization (WHO) stated that persons with disabilities die up to 20 years earlier than those without disabilities considering that they are at twice the risk of developing certain health conditions. A survey by the Nigeria Demographic And Health Survey Program in 2018 showed an estimated 7% of persons above the age of five (as well as 9% of those 60 or older) experience some level of difficulty in at least one functional domain – seeing, hearing, communication, cognition, walking, or self-care.

The situation of people with disabilities in Nigeria is horrifying because they experience double vulnerability. They are marginalised and treated unfairly without any regard for their human rights. Infact, their rights are largely disregarded from birth when they are name-called, shamed, mocked and even abandoned by primary care giver(s). Terrible cases also abound of them being hunted, persecuted and killed on account of superstitious beliefs. Notwithstanding these gross human rights abuse and violations, persons with disabilities continue to strive to exist in an environment that ordinarily excludes them.

CHALLENGES

Indubitably, persons with disabilities in Nigeria face compounding multi-systemic barriers and challenges ranging from:

I. Access to Education, Jobs, Health Care, Buildings and Transportation

Structural and systemic limitations and setbacks pose a huge barrier for persons with disabilities in Nigeria, it is almost impossible for them to access basic services. They are unable to get quality education due to low accessibility to schools with provisions for their special needs, inadequate learning materials, lack of teachers/ tutors with inclusive education training, and non functional special need schools.

In cases where these can be found, it is extremely expensive and reserved for the elite, leaving people with disabilities with little or no valuable education. Also, it is rare to see most people with disabilities in Nigeria owning inclusive digital design and tools.

At the healthcare sector, people with disabilities also have to deal with untrained health workers, unfavourable facilities and low coverage insurance system. It is normal to see people with disabilities on the streets begging and soliciting for support to

enable them access basic healthcare. Most structures/facilities in Nigeria both public and private are not disability friendly and makes it extremely difficult for people with disabilities to access. These systemic and cultural barriers contribute to the isolation of people with disability and by extension their non participation in different spheres of life. Unarguably, their ability to show up is first tied to their accessibility of these spaces.

II. Socio-Cultural, Political and Economic Discrimination/ Stigma.

Disabled persons in Nigeria experience varying forms of discrimination, it is often attributed to religious, cultural and traditional norms/beliefs. Even as minors, they are seen as unclean, incomplete and evil, subject of deliverance, cleansing and purification. They are made to undergo rituals/rites with demeaning and dehumanising process emboldened by silence of the victims. Overtime, these abhorrent discriminatory practices have strengthened misconceptions about disability and reinforced conscious and unconscious biases about people with disability.

III. Poor Political Will

Lack of political will by the Nigerian Government to adopt and implement laws that exclusively protect the rights of persons with disabilities remains an impediment to the full enjoyment of the rights of persons with disabilities. Inadvertently, affecting their quality of life, performance and meaningful contribution to the society. It was not until 2018, Following years of resilient effort by national and international human rights groups and bodies, the National Assembly passed into law “The Discrimination Against Persons with Disabilities (Prohibition) Act”. This act provides for the absolute integration of persons with disabilities into the society, the act also prohibits and penalises discrimination against them. Additionally, the Act establishes a National Commission of People with Disabilities and charges the Commission with the responsibilities for their education, health care, social, economic and civil rights; and for related matters. Indeed, the passing of this Act is a step in the right direction. However, only 9 of the 36 states in Nigeria have domesticated this law and even the celebrated states struggle with implementation. Proactive measures must be taken if Nigeria is to fulfil her obligation under the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

RECOMMENDATION

While it is important for actors to sustain advocacy for implementation of existing laws, deliberate innovative measures should be explored using technology and assistive technology (devices, software and equipments like mobility aids, walkers and wheelchairs) to solve some of the challenges persons with disabilities face in the society.

1. Access To Technology Tools

Technology has proved to be a useful tool to promote social inclusion, global development and equality. The technology space is founded on innovations, that allow people to access skills, education and employment. Through technology and assistive technology like screen readers, braille displays, braille note takers, electronic magnifiers, optical character recognition software (OCR), screen readout software, text to speech software, and alternative input devices persons with disabilities can be empowered to attain their full potential thereby activating their ABILITY to compete favorably in the mainstream society. It is also important that developers and designers understand assistive technologies and ensure creation of apps, websites and platforms that are disability friendly. Hence, the need for institutions to adopt disability inclusive models/facilities, unique learning programs, safe ICT spaces, and investment into research on the intersecting areas of technology and disability.

Truly, technology as a leveller requires effort to create access for already marginalized groups, if not the digital divide will persistently widen and this will impact on existing inequalities. There is need to close up these gaps by providing access to technology and technology tools, including relevant training to enhance proper usage. It is imperative that people with disabilities are part of the global digital transformation, so their potential and unique abilities are tapped into and they are not left behind.

There must be deliberate promotion of accessibility and inclusivity in the technology space. An example is the lack of screen reader feature on some mobile applications and sites. On iPhone, the feature is called “VoiceOver”, a commendable addition but only a minority of people with disabilities in Nigeria have the means to acquire this brand. When digital tools and assistive technologies are accessible for education and empowerment of persons with disability, it becomes possible for them to contribute to national growth and advancement.

2. Digital Space Inclusion

It is crucial for people with disabilities to lead actions and

champion interventions that affect them in the digital space. Programmes must reflect their contributions, lived experiences and realities, solutions must be with and for them. This way inclusion and ownership is built into the project design process. There is need for more work to be done in Nigeria to make digital spaces inclusive for people with disabilities, design tools including user interface design box ought to be improved.

Digital transformation offers new opportunities for people with disabilities especially in developing countries. Online jobs can help people with disabilities to have a sense of work and be empowered to contribute creatively to societal issues. E-commerce opens up great entrepreneurship possibilities for people with disabilities in Nigeria, they can access income and raise their financial status that would have been limited due to their disabilities. Online learning platforms can help people with disabilities especially young people to learn new skills and gain insight on areas of interest, including obtaining certification from recognized local and global institutions to boost their portfolio, apply for jobs and explore opportunities.

3. Stakeholders Engagement

Technology constantly offers youths, women and children with disabilities new opportunities to explore their talents and potentials. There is need for stakeholders to challenge existing stereotypes and spoken/unspoken biases that inherently set people with disabilities backward. Issues of accessibility and affordability of digital tools must be acknowledged and addressed, as well as provision of adequate social protection measures and human rights violation reportage pathways to encourage both offline and online reporting.

CONCLUSION

The interplay between technology and law to advance the rights of people with disability is very promising. It is not enough to enact laws and policies to address the issues they face. Government and other stakeholders should embrace strategic collaboration to campaign and raise awareness on the dangers of non-inclusion of people with disabilities and the potential of technology to overcome existing setbacks they face. Importantly, investments must echo global standards for the protection and promotion of their rights. Finally, it is possible to maximize the benefits of technology and law to create dynamic attitudinal shift of societal perception of DIS(ABILITY) from isolation to inclusion for complete integration of people with disabilities into the society.

SUCCESS STORIES

*NAMES HAVE BEEN CHANGED TO PROTECT SURVIVORS

WOMAN GAINS ACCESS TO HER HUSBAND'S PROPERTIES CEASED BY BROTHER-IN-LAW

‘A’

(Names withheld) is a widow who lost her husband in 2022. She had 4 daughters with her deceased husband

younger brother moved into her husband's house occupying three out of the five rooms in the house, leaving 'A' and her children to 2 rooms only. He also took over 'A's' husband's lands and other properties claiming 'A' had no sons and the widow and her daughters had no inheritance right. Upon being informed of the situation by the widow, WACOL swung into action by inviting 'B' for a mediation. Parties had a session with WACOL Legal Unit. The matter was referred to a family meeting following several joint sessions. After the family meeting, 'A' reported back that the matter had been resolved at the family meeting as 'B' was instructed to relinquish all properties in his possession belonging to the deceased back to 'A' and her children.



during his lifetime. Shortly after her husband died and was buried, 'B' (Names withheld), her deceased husband's immediate

WIDOW WHO WAS DISINHERITED GETS JUSTICE THROUGH WACOL'S INTERVENTION

Amara lost her husband sometimes in January and he was buried in March. Immediately after her husband died, Obi who is her husband's eldest brother and other brothers-in-law took possession of her husband's property ranging from his two ATM cards, phones, keys to his car and the car itself, as well as all documents belonging to Amara and her late husband. Obi made all the preparations for the burial and expended some amount

of money from the deceased's account without giving account to Amara or her children. On the part of Obi, he was the next of kin to his brother as he claimed his children were still young. He claimed he gave Amara one of the ATMs which is his brother's personal account but the account was empty as he had expended everything for his burial. He also claimed that the other account was a joint account between the deceased and his father and therefore the property of the family. After several sessions of mediation, Obi returned the car key, phones and the documents to Amara. The balance from the joint account was shared and 50% was given to Amara and her children while the balance was shared between her brothers-in-law.

SAVED FROM DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

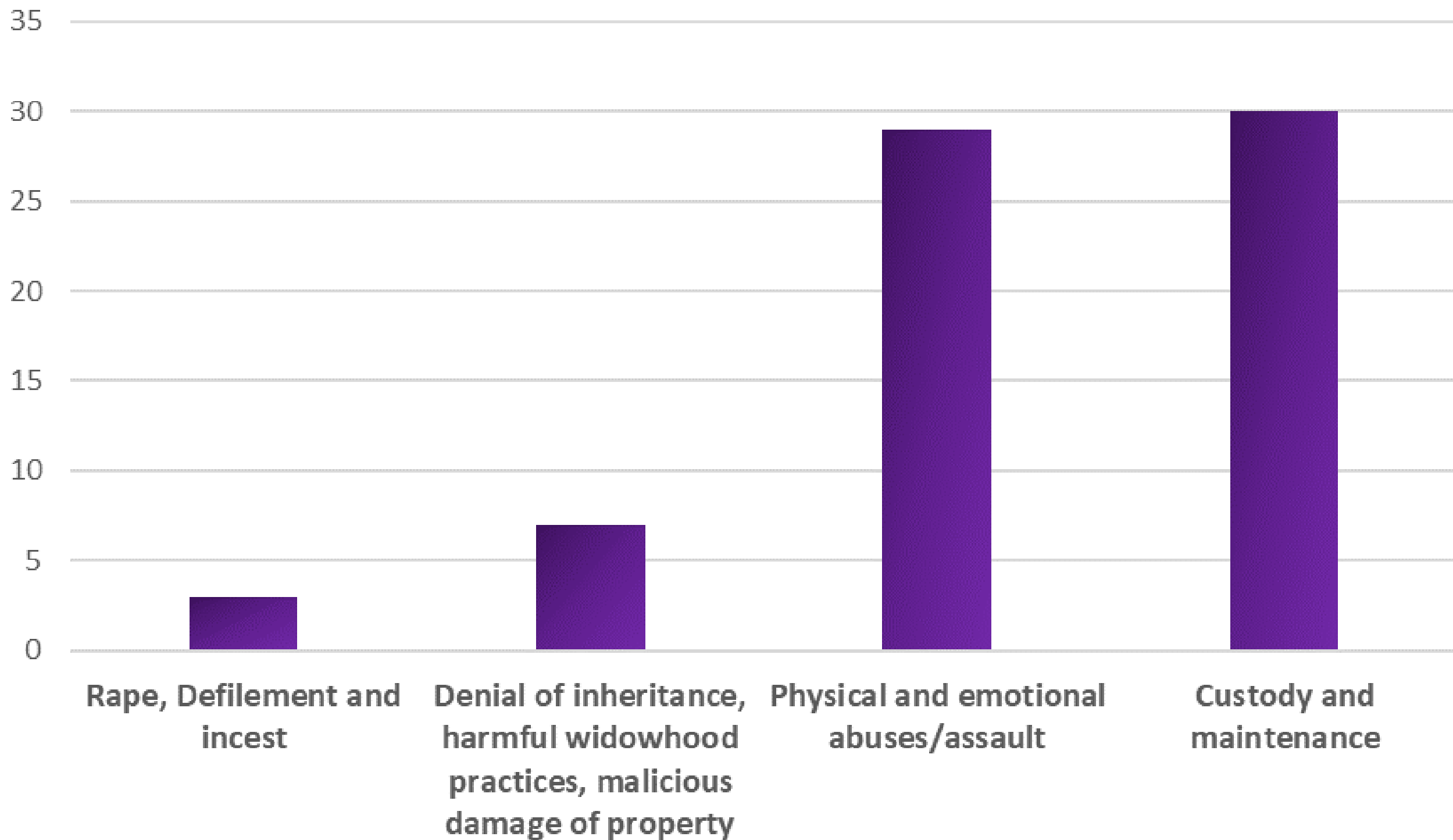
‘H’ (Names withheld) came to WACOL office, Enugu early October with fresh wounds resulting from hot pressing iron. She complained that her husband battered her by burning her with hot iron. Her husband used a hot-pressing iron to burn the left part of her face down to her lips and her chest including her two breasts. Seeing the plight of ‘A’, WACOL intervened by writing to the Ogui Police. Upon receipt of the letter of intervention from WACOL by the Police, the Police immediately effected the arrest of accused. The matter was transferred to the State Criminal Investigation Department for thorough investigation and arraignment.

DOMESTIC VIOLENCE STOPPED BY WACOL’S INTERVENTION

‘B’ complained to WACOL that her husband constantly abuses her physically. During the last incidence, the husband almost strangled her in her sleep. According to ‘B’, the husband woke up on the date of the last incidence around 12 midnight and woke her up, pushing her from the bed. He raised a pestle to hit her with a terrible countenance. She also reported that he tried to strangle her twice that day. Part of ‘B’s’ complain is that her husband not only physically abuses her but also verbally abuse her by saying all sorts of demeaning words to her. She needed an assurance from her husband that all forms of violence would cease. On the part of ‘C’, ‘B’s’, husband, he apologized that he was sorry about the incidence. He also made a verbal undertaking not to either physical or verbally abuse his wife again. Parties were given a date for follow up and ‘B’ stated that the issues had been resolved as ‘C’ no longer abused her physically or verbally anymore since the intervention of WACOL.

CASE BREAKDOWN

for August 2023



Gender Disaggregated data



Female complainants total: 58



Male complainants total: 11



Overall total: 69 cases.

Age Range

Under 18: 1

18-24: 2

25-34: 24

35-44: 25

45-59: 11

60 and above: 2

Unknown: 4



CONTRIBUTORS

Prof. Joy Ngozi Ezeilo (SAN, OON) is the founding director of Women's Aid Collective (WACOL), she is the Emeritus Dean Faculty of Law, University of Nigeria and Former United Nations Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons.

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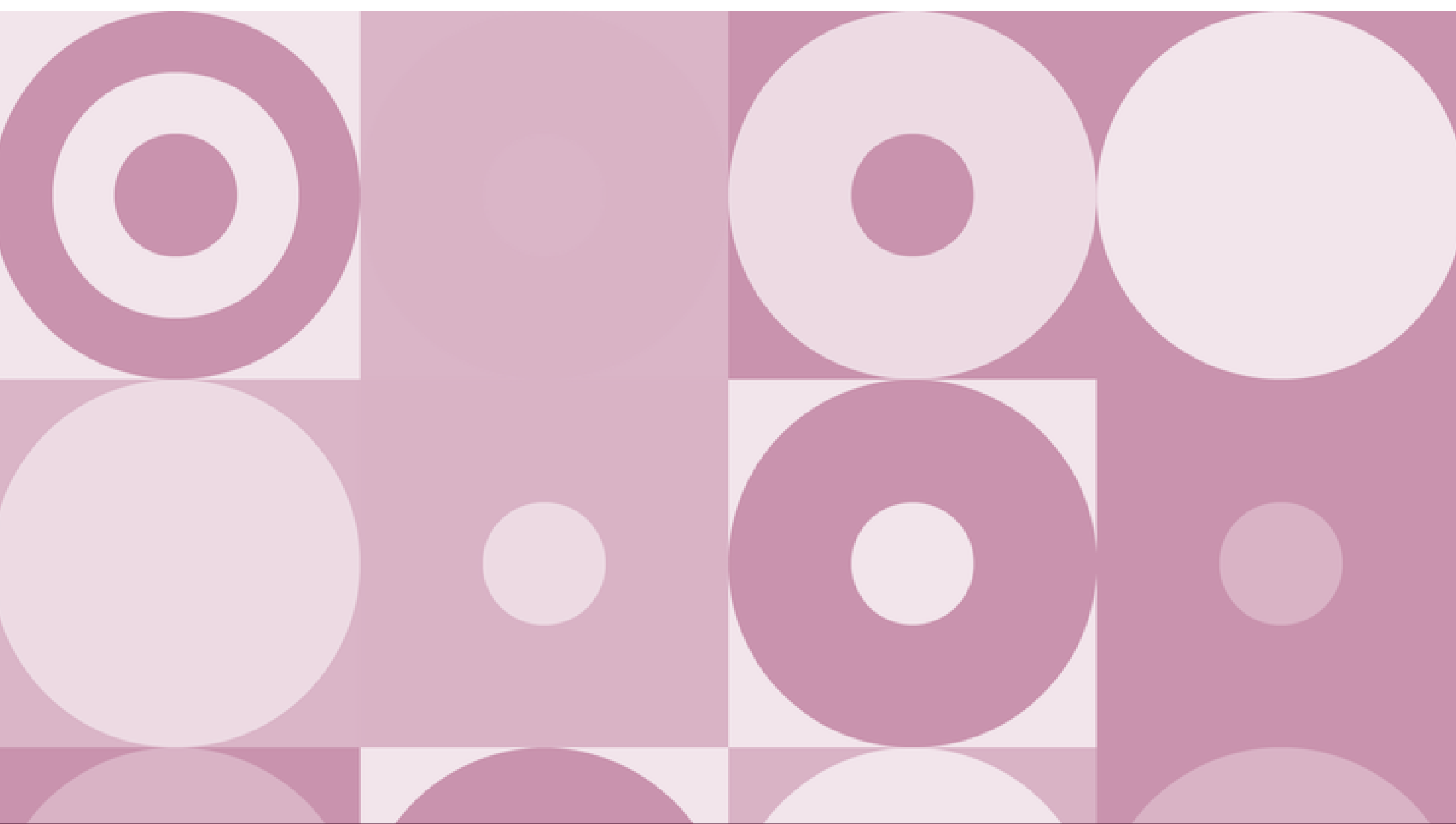
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ADVERTISEMENT & UPCOMING EVENTS

To Report any threat or human rights violation call our hotlines:
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