



UGANDA NETWORK OF YOUNG PEOPLE LIVING WITH HIV/AIDS

## Press release:

**Date:** Wednesday, November 27, 2019

Wednesday, 27 November, 2019, the International Community of Women Living with HIV Eastern Africa (ICWEA), Alliance of Women Advocating for Change (WAC) and Uganda Network of Young People living with HIV&AIDS (UNYPA) joins the rest of the world to commemorate the 16 days of activism to end violence against women and girls with a theme. **TOGETHER WE RISE TO END VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS**

- Gender-based violence (GBV) or violence against women and girls (VAWG), is a global pandemic that affects 1 in 3 women in their lifetime. The numbers are staggering:
  - 35% of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or non-partner sexual violence.
  - Globally, 7% of women have been sexually assaulted by someone other than a partner.
  - Globally, as many as 38% of murders of women are committed by an intimate partner.
  - 200 million women have experienced female genital mutilation/cutting.
  - Women living with HIV have reported being coerced and forced into sterilization because of their HIV status
- This issue is not only devastating for survivors of violence and their families, but also entails significant social and economic costs. In some countries, violence against women is estimated to cost countries up to 3.7% of their GDP – more than double what most governments spend on education. Failure to address this issue also entails a significant cost for the future. Numerous studies have shown that children growing up with violence are more likely to become survivors themselves or perpetrators of violence in the future.
- One characteristic of gender-based violence is that it knows no social or economic boundaries and affects women and girls of all socio-economic backgrounds: this issue needs to be addressed in both developing and developed countries.
- Violence against women is one of the 12 focus areas highlighted as an obstacle to the achievement of the objectives of equality and development (Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action - The Fourth World Conference on Women -15 September, 1995). This Declaration calls for all stakeholders to address human rights issues ranging from: Physical, sexual and psychological violence occurring in the families- including battering, sexual abuse of females, dowry-related violence, marital rape, female genital mutilation and other traditional practices harmful to women; non-spousal violence and violence related to exploitation, forced pregnancy; forced sterilization and forced abortion, coercive/forced use of contraceptives, female infanticide and prenatal sex selection among others.

- Lifetime prevalence of Gender Based Violence (GBV) against women in Uganda is estimated at 51% (UN Women, 2016, Global Gender Gap Report, 2017) - suggesting that violence against women is rampant in the country.
- The report warns that this statistic is well **above the average in Africa and worldwide, making Uganda one of the most dangerous places in the world for women.**
- While Uganda is part of the international conversation on human rights, violence against women persists. This has been associated with costs of the complaint process, gaps between policy and practice (Universal Periodic Review, 2011); patrilineal system (UN WOMEN, 2019; UNDP 2015); conflict and post conflict situation, lack of respect for human rights; widespread tolerance for VAWG, harmful practices and denial of Sexual Reproductive Health & Rights (SRHR) (MGLSD 2016); economic dependency (Uganda Gender-based Policy briefing paper April 2018) and the association between HIV/AIDS and violence against women and girls (UN Women, 2011; Action Aid, April 2018).
- Wife battering is still widely tolerated, with 49% of women and 41% of men agreeing that it is justified for a man to beat his wife (The UDHS of 2016)- indicating a small reduction in the percentage.
- 22% of women compared with 8% of men have ever experienced sexual violence; 11% of women who have ever been pregnant have experienced physical violence during one or more pregnancies; 37% of ever-married women reported that their current or most recent spouse/partner had ever exhibited at least three types of specified controlling behaviors; 46% of ever married women say that they are afraid of their current or most recent spouse/partner some or most of the time; 39% of women have sustained some form of injury; Child Marriage stands at 40% (UN Women 2016), 12% of girls in Uganda get married at the age of 15 and 46% by the age of 18, early marriage and pregnancy stand at 22.3% for young people between 12-17 years (UNICEF, 2015).
- To-date. Women are rotting in prisons because of criminalization due to HIV, Young women living with HIV in hiding due to stigma and discrimination, Key populations including female sex workers are being rounded up by police, and as a result they keep in hiding, Health care providers have discriminatory tendencies towards women living with HIV & young women hence delivering from homes and Traditional Birth Attendants. Additionally, while it is known globally that VAW/G escalates HIV spread, the funding to cause is wanting. All the above factors weave together to compromise the gains made in the HIV & AIDS response.
- **HIV Criminalization:** We have documented cases of unjust application of the criminal laws to women living with HIV based solely on their HIV status. Such unjust application of the criminal laws in relation to HIV is not guided by the best available scientific and medical evidence relating to HIV, fails to uphold the principles of legal and judicial fairness (including key criminal law principles of legality, foreseeability, intent, causality, proportionality and proof, and infringes upon the human rights of those involved in criminal law cases. In Uganda the laws which are currently used for criminalization on the basis of HIV status include the Penal Code and HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Act 2014. HIV criminalization increase stigma, violates human rights, and are counterproductive. Criminalization does not reduce the likelihood of HIV transmission or deter individuals from risk-taking behavior, says *Ms. Lillian Mworeko, the Executive Director of ICWEA*

- We recognize achievements that have been registered so far in Uganda to end violence against women and girls. comprehensive plan for a public health response to equity barriers to HIV, Tuberculosis and Malaria services which was developed with the leadership of the Ministry of Health, the clauses in HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Act which prohibits discrimination on the basis of HIV, Domestic violence Act, Anti-FGM Act, and the Constitution of the republic of Uganda which prohibits any cultural practices that undermine the dignity of women among others.
- ICWEA, UNYPA and AWAC today make a commitment to join hands to work towards ending violence against women and girls. Our annual plan that we are launching today will guide the programmes and activities that we shall undertake towards ending violence against women. Today we too shall unveil a list of prominent personalities that we will work with in order to realize our goal and these include The Ambassador of the Kingdom of the Netherlands, H.E. Henk Jan Bakker; the Queen of Alur and others. We are committed to working with local authorities and women at the grassroots.

### **Call to Action/Asks**

- **Action plan on ending VAW/G:** Decreasing violence against women and girls requires a community-based, multi-pronged approach, and sustained engagement with multiple stakeholders. We call upon all stakeholders in this August house to own and commit to the action plan on ending VAW/G presented on this day.
- **Funding:** We call upon all development partners to commit more resources to end VAW/G
- **Enabling environment:** We call upon all policy makers to work together to improve the legal and policy environment and be accountable on ending VAW/G
- **Implementation:** We call upon all implementers to implement relevant policies, laws and programs including generation of evidence on ending VAW/G
- **Reporting:** We call upon all stakeholders at all level to be vigilant and report cases of VAW/G

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