

The following report was presented to the National Assembly of Zimbabwe on 13th May 2014 by Hon Paurina Mpariwa, MP.

## REPORT OF THE CONFERENCE OF WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND GIRLS

### **1.0 Introduction**

1.1 The Conference of Women Parliamentarians took place at the precincts of the Pan-African Parliament in Midrand South Africa on 1st and 2nd November, 2013 under the Theme: “Parliamentarians Responding to Violence against Women and Girls in Africa, from Legislation to Effective Enforcement”.

1.2 The Zimbabwe delegation comprised the following:-

- a) Hon. Sarah Mahoka, Member of Parliament;
- b) Hon. Paurina Mpariwa, Member of Parliament;
- c) Hon. Prisciah Mupfumira, Member of Parliament; and
- d) Ms. Rudo N. E. Doka, Director – External Relations and Secretary to the delegation.

1.3 It has been noted with concern that Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) is a pandemic of serious proportions in Africa taking various forms, often reflecting the political, social, cultural and economic diversities of our societies, cutting across borders, race, class, ethnicity and religion.

1.4 Today, violence against women and girls is increasingly recognised as a threat to democracy; a barrier to lasting peace; a burden on national economies, an impediment to sustainable development; and appalling human rights violation. Violence against women, according to analysts reduces the countries’ ability to harness the full potential of their citizens for sustainable and equitable development.

### **2.0 Background**

2.1 Women and men of all ages are victims of violence and human rights violations, but specific cases of these violations are committed almost solely against women and girls. However, the plight of these women and girls frequently goes unnoticed because in many different ways across cultures, they are treated with less regard than men. Africa has had a long standing tradition of unequal power relations between men and women leading to an extremely high rate of violence against women beginning in childhood.

2.2 The United Nations (UN) defines violence against women as, “any act of gender based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life”. (United Nations Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women 1993).

### **3.0 A Situation Analysis of Violence Against Women in Africa**

3.1 A representative of the UN Women to Ethiopia, African Union and United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) gave a general overview of violence against Women and Girls in Africa. The Post 2015 Development Agenda is proposing four priority development outcomes as follows:-

- a) Structural Economic transformation and inclusive growth;
- b) Innovation and technology transfer;
- c) Human development; and
- d) Financial partnerships.

3.2 The Africa position paper emphasises that in order to achieve these development outcomes, there are development enablers which should be given priority and one of them is gender equality and women's development with specific focus on eradicating violence against women and children; eradicating harmful traditional practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and early marriage; and eliminating gender based discrimination in political and decision-making processes. Protecting the human rights of all citizens, including universal and equitable access to quality health care with special focus on vulnerable groups including children, the youth, people with disabilities, people living with HIV and AIDS, have also been given prominence in the future that Africa wants for its citizens.

3.3 Statistics reflecting the magnitude of violence against women and girls were provided and they reflected that this is a pandemic of serious proportions in Africa, taking various forms, often reflecting political, social, cultural, political and economic diversities of our societies, cutting across borders, race, class, ethnicity and religion.

3.4 However, the emphasis of the presentations was not about statistics, but on what you can DO to reduce the statics, i.e. TIME FOR ACTION. It was also not about legislating and adopting policies against violence, but about taking concrete action to implement national legislation and regional and international instruments pertaining to gender based violence. It is about appreciating efforts to break the silence and raise the visibility and profile of Violence against Women and Girls at the continental, regional and national levels.

### **4.0 Causes of Violence**

4.1 One of the presentations highlighted the fact that Gender-Based Violence (GBV) in Africa, as elsewhere in the world, is a complex issue that has its roots in the structural inequalities between men and women which perpetuates the power struggles between men and women, girls and boys. The analysis goes on to say that women's subordinate status to men in many societies, coupled with a general acceptance of interpersonal violence as a means of resolving conflict, renders women disproportionately vulnerable to violence from all levels of society. UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993).

4.2 During armed conflict, sexual violence is more prevalent as it is used by armed groups and soldiers to torture civilians, extract information, proffer small arms and light weapons, abduct girls and women as sex slaves and sometimes train them as combatants.

4.3 Rape is used by armed forces groups as a method of warfare, to torture, injure, degrade, displace, intimidate, punish or simply destroy the fabric of a community.

4.4 Early marriage of children is a form of violence and some of the factors that underpin the practice are gender inequality, poverty, social exclusion, marginalisation and insecurity. Poverty is a major factor underlying child marriage. Girls are viewed as an economic burden and early marriage is perceived as a solution.

## **5.0 Forms of Violence**

5.1 The most extreme cases of VAWG typically involve sexual violence in the form of rape. Sexual violence should also be understood to encompass forced prostitution, sexual slavery, forced impregnation, forced termination of pregnancy, forced sterilization, strip searches, inappropriate medical examinations and forced maternity. Sexual violence is also now being used as a weapon in armed conflict situations.

5.2 Gender based violence can be perpetrated powerfully through words, causing emotional and psychological distress. Subtle forms of abuse include denying poor communities food, education and medical care resulting in high infant and maternal mortality rates, malnutrition and high levels of illiteracy.

5.3 Other forms of violence include Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), domestic violence, social exclusion and child marriage.

## **6.0 Negative Impact of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

6.1 Women and girls who are victims of violence often experience life-long emotional distress, mental health problems and poor reproductive health. Some are at a high risk of acquiring HIV and end up being long term users of health services.

6.2 The cost to women, their children, families and communities is a significant obstacle to reducing poverty, achieving gender equality and equity and ensuring a peaceful transition for post-conflict societies.

6.3 Victims of sexual violence suffer bodily and mental harm, stigmatisation and in some cases rejection by their families, friends and communities.

6.4 The practice of child marriage has harmful consequences on children which include poorer health outcomes, lower level of education, higher risk of violence and abuse, persistent poverty, missed opportunity for empowerment and complications related to pregnancy and childbirth. International agreements suggested that child marriage is a violation of interconnected rights including:-

- The right to equality on grounds of sex and age;
- The right to marry and establish a family;
- The right to life;
- The right to development; and
- The highest attainable standard of health.

6.5 By violating women, weapon bearers are able to humiliate, and demoralise the men who could not protect them. Where the integrity of the community and the family is perceived to be bound in the virtue of women, rape can be used as a deliberate tactic to destabilise communities and families. A climate of impunity can cause the total disintegration of a society.

## **7.0 Costs Related to Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)**

### **7.1 The direct economic costs of violence include:-**

- a) Health sector costs,
- b) The expenditures of police, judicial, and social service sectors in responding to victims; and
- c) The direct out-of-pocket costs paid by the victims themselves.

### **7.2 Additional indirect economic costs:-**

- a) Result from time lost to productive labour and household services due to physical disability as a result of a violent incident; and
- b) In African countries where women perform up to 70% of agricultural activity, the labour time lost may have substantial negative impacts on the economy and on food security. (Diop 2012).

### **7.3 Costs not estimated**

These include:-

- a) Those due to the psychological and emotional impacts of Intimate Partner Violence/ Violence Against Women (IPV/VAW) on victims and their children, which are borne at all the individual, household, community and society/nation.
- b) Cost on self-realisation by victims.

### **7.4 Other societal costs that are not captured in cost estimates of Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)**

- a) The inter-generational impacts on children's behaviour; such as school performance;
- b) Delinquency and violence which have been measured in both developed and developing countries but are difficult to express in monetary terms;
- c) Children's experience of IPV in the home is also a key contributor to inter-generational persistence of IPV, another unmeasured cost to households, communities and the nation as a whole; and
- d) Studies have found that children who experience or witness domestic violence are more likely to use violence in their own relationships as adults.

### **7.5 Who Pays?**

Individual;

Household;

Community and

Societal/national; and

Regional.

### **7.6 Key Policy Implications**

- a) There is a social and economic cost to VAW, Domestic violence imposes significant costs both on victims, on communities and on societies; Imposes costs on the state;
  - More focus should be put on the effective enforcement and implementation of laws and policies with adequate allocation of human and financial resources;

- Effective response to violence must be multi-sectoral and culturally-specific; and
- There is a need to strengthen collection, recording, analyzing, storage and sharing of data and information on the prevalence and costs of domestic violence evidence is key.

## **8.0 HIV and VAWG**

8.1 Globally, new HIV infections among adults and children reduced by 33% since 2001.

8.2 In children alone, new HIV Infections reduced to 260 000 in 2012, a reduction of 52% since 2001. AIDS-related deaths have also dropped by 30% since the peak in 2005 as access to antiretroviral treatment expands.

8.3 By the end of 2012, some 9.7 million people in low-and middleincome countries were accessing antiretroviral therapy, an increase of nearly 20% in just one year.

## **8.4 The Effects On**

8.4.1 The rate of new infections in young women between the ages of 15 and 24 remains staggeringly high, even though it has reduced considerably.

8.4.2 Young females aged 15-24 years living with HIV had decreased from 870 000 (810 000-1 100 000) in 2005 to 710 000 (660 000 – 860 000) in 2012.

8.4.3 In Sub-Saharan Africa, women constitute 57 percent of all people living with HIV/AIDS.

8.4.4 For women in their reproductive years (15-49), HIV/AIDS is the leading cause of death.

8.4.5 A study in South Africa recently suggested that nearly one in seven cases of young women acquiring HIV could have been prevented if the women had not been subjected to intimate partner violence.

8.4.6 Many national HIV/AIDS programmes fail to address underlying gender inequalities. In 2008, only 52% of countries who reported to the UN General Assembly included specific, budgeted support for womenfocused HIV/AIDS programmes.

8.4.7 Ending the HIV epidemic requires taking a political stand against violence, ensuring a coordinated multi-sectoral response to prevent violence against women and managing its consequences.

## **8.5 What is our Task**

8.5.1 Secure Women's rights:-

- a) Enact laws that protect women from violence;
- b) Challenge social norms which undermine women's rights;
- c) Expand access to legal services and economic resources for women; and
- d) Ensure that programmes that address women's rights and support women's development in all spheres are properly funded, managed and implemented.

8.5.2 A bigger question should be – what has sustained violence against women through all the generations? What is it that can be done differently?

8.5.3 We have to go beyond simple rhetoric and address violence in our daily lives – both women and men. It has to be everyone's business.

## **9.0 The Role of Parliamentarians**

9.1 As Parliamentarians, we need to secure women's rights, by not only enacting laws that protect women from violence, but by challenging social norms which undermine women's rights, expanding access to legal services, economic resources and health services for women. Laws should criminalise domestic violence, FGM, child marriage and rape. Since legislation by itself is not sufficient, it is fundamental for Parliamentarians to support development and approve gender specific budget allocations for health, implementation of programmes, education, awareness campaigns, and counselling services.

9.2 Parliamentarians and Women's Parliamentary caucuses should forge strategic partnerships with National Women's Machineries and Civil Society Organisations to form coordinated support for provision of multi-sectoral services, programmes and responses to survivors of gender-based violence.

9.3 Parliamentarians can also utilize their community mobilisation power to raise awareness and address structural underlying causes and risk factors to prevent Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG). We can help sensitise people and shape public opinion.

9.4 The wider community can be engaged by Parliamentarians, in an open debate, on changing social norms and attitudes to send the message that VAWG is unacceptable, will not be tolerated and perpetrators will be brought to justice.

9.5 Police, prosecutors, judges, health care providers, social workers, religious and community leaders can be brought together to wage the battle together and hold each other accountable.

9.6 Parliamentarians are also called to strive to ensure that child marriage is a critical issue on the political agenda and follow up issues in close collaboration with civil society. We can also play a crucial role in the leadership and engagement on abandonment to galvanise the attention of community leaders and the media.

## **10.0 Conclusion**

10.1 A law is potent only if it has the financial and human resources required for its implementation. These financial requirements should be reflected in budget allocations.

10.2 Ending VAWG requires the full engagement of all sectors of society, that is involving law makers, civil society agents, religious and community leaders, law enforcement agencies, social workers and health care providers.