CSOs take to streets to protest increasing rape, murder of women

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• Urge FG To Declare State Of Emergency Over SGBV Cases  
  
• Survivor’s Mother Knew About Her Daughter’s Rape, Alleges Jigawa SARC  
  
Several Civil Society Organisations (CSOs), including concerned Nigerians, took to the streets of major cities yesterday to protest the gruesome rape and murder of several Nigerian women over the last few days as well as police extra-judicial killing that led to the death of Tina Ezekwe.  
  
Calling the federal and state governments to declare a total state of emergency on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) against Nigerian women, they demanded stiffer penalties for rapists and urged the police to be alive to their responsibilities. Dressed in all black outfits, the protesters revealed that SGBV has become so bad that at least, two cases trend online everyday in Nigeria.  
  
Head of the Dorothy Njemanze Foundation, Dorothy Njemanze, vowed that if both arms of governments fail to declare a state of emergency over SGBV against Nigerian women, they would not leave the streets until something is done. Speaking with The Guardian, Njemanze, a foremost women rights activist lamented that justice is only for the uber-rich in Nigeria.  
  
“If you are not very rich and you are sexually assaulted or raped in this country, no justice for you. The police is terribly underfunded and cannot carry out investigations or necessary medicals to secure convictions. The medical tests and process needed to secure a conviction is expensive and tasking and the government is not helping in anyway.  
  
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“They pay lip service to helping victims get justice but do nothing. We need laws to be domesticated and we need funding urgently. Do we have the willpower to implement these things? Look at the people we’re looking up to, to implement these things, what did they do? They slashed funding for health and education and gave themselves the money to renovate a building that needs no renovation.”  
  
“Yes, the police always ask for money to pursue cases. In fact, just two weeks ago, the police asked me for “enquiry money” for the rape of a child, the money was just to ask them questions; we hadn’t even gotten to the opening file stage. Police stations get N50, 000 per quarter (three months) to run the station; this amount is the perfect structure for corruption to thrive. That money the National Assembly wants to use for renovation, let’s use it to build forensic labs and get justice for rape victims. 48 hours after the rape and murder of several women, we didn’t hear anything from our leaders but we are telling them now that failure to declare a state of emergency on SGBV, we would all hit the streets till we get what we want,” she declared.  
  
While the country is still in shock about Farishina, who was raped by 11 men in Jigawa State, manager of the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC), Jigawa, Dr Abbas Yaugarba alleged that it was the girl’s mother who was pimping her out to be raped. “The rape didn’t happen at once, it was over a space of about five years. Men would sleep with her and give her money. The last rape that blew the whole case open, she was with her sister when this man approached her, gave her N50, took her into his room to rape her. The sister reported to their uncle who burst into the room and raised alarm.”  
  
Dr Abbas lamented the fact that rape was very common in the state, divulging that about 85 percent of rape victims are children below five years. “Men keep raping babies and instead of decreasing, it keeps increasing. Out of 200 cases, we have gotten just five convictions. The convictions are low because of continuous court adjournments, societal and political influence. Rapists keep getting off because victims keep dropping cases due to pressure.”  
  
“Everyone rapes here, brothers, fathers, politicians, grandfathers and religious leaders, that is why it is difficult to get rid of this problem. Most times, the victims say they don’t want to take legal action because of pressure. In this case, the mother denied pimping her daughter out even though we know this was the case.”  
  
He further revealed: “The police is a hindrance for us because they take money from the family and refuse to investigate. Sometimes, after taking money, they will drag the case for a year; which victim will wait around for a whole year? We face all kinds of problems, from the victims themselves, the police, the courts, politicians and so on. Rape and assault is on the rise because the men refuse to leave minors alone, and because people that are supposed to help are doing it, too, they refuse to do anything about the situation.  
  
“We’re dealing with a case presently of an Imam taking care of almajiri children; he rapes the children nightly and it was one of the boys that told someone else and we got to know about it. We need the police to cooperate with us because that is the first step towards getting justice for victims.”  
  
Coordinator of the Lagos State Domestic and Sexual Violence Response Team (DSVRT), Titilola Vivour-Adeniyi bemoaned the recent wave of unfortunate rape and murder of several young women around the country, but pointed out that there is an increase in reportage of cases with social media to thank for this. “These are some of the many advantages of technology. More and more Nigerians are taking to social media to report these horrifying crimes and it goes far and wide in a matter of minutes. It is very unfortunate that women are still dying from sexual violence and we all need to begin to take sexual violence very serious.”  
  
“Uwa and Barakat’s case, unfortunate as they are has debunked certain myths of being at the wrong place or wearing the wrong clothes. They were in church and at home respectively, yet raped and killed. Where exactly are women safe? We need to begin to address these rapists and call them out for what they are. Our society needs to focus on rapists, encourage and help survivors get justice and speak their truth. Stop shaming survivors and asking them unnecessary questions.”  
  
On allegations that the police are a cog in the wheel of progress, she said while she doesn’t work directly with the police, her agency has been fighting for family support units (FSU) in select police stations to be upgraded and officers re-trained. “We need professionals handling SGBV and not just anyone.  
  
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The victim has experienced violence and needs justice and it behoves on us to give it to them. Yes, we hear of the police collecting money from both rapists and survivors and truth be told, we need to better fund frontline responders including the police so they can carry out their jobs well and better help victims.  
  
“As evidenced by over 90 convictions of sexual offenses secured in 2019 alone, such inhumane acts would not be tolerated and we will continue to ensure that the full arm of the law is unleashed on any offender. I am encouraging any one who has experienced either Domestic or Sexual Violence to please reach out to us on 0906-288-7844 or dial \*6820# to report.”  
  
Anuli Aniebo, the founder of HEIR Women Development describes rape in Nigeria as a pandemic, adding that the country has sexualised and suppressed women and girls to the extent that most rape cases go unreported. “It is disgusting, disheartening, ridiculous, disappointing and a shame to us as a nation. In 2018, Nigeria was ranked as the ninth most dangerous country to be a woman/girl and we can clearly see it is true by what is happening now. The constant rape and murder of women is a tragedy, shame and disgrace.”  
  
Aniebo said it is difficult to secure as much convictions for rapists as they would like because first and foremost, most rape cases go unreported and as such, first responders cannot do anything. “Also, in many families, we don’t discuss molestation and rape openly even though it is happening in most families. Most victims are usually silent and feel it’s their fault. For the few that speak out, we resort to victim blaming.  
  
“In a recent NOI poll, 47percent of respondents said the major cause of rape is indecent dressing. This might sound shocking but this is how most of us thing, we need to go back to the basics. Our school curriculum needs to include SGBV studies. Most women don’t even realise what they are going through is rape because we have been brainwashed. Even if you have a boyfriend, he has no right to rape you.  
  
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“How many of us know the law, the VAPP law, Child Rights Act (CRA) and so on? Just 21 states have domesticated the CRA, while a paltry three states have domesticated VAPP, what about the rest? In 2020, we are still struggling to raise the age limit for marriage and consent in many Nigerian states, this is beyond disgraceful,” she said.  
  
Aniebo also noted: “We all need to be re-educated because most of the things we were taught or learnt as kids are wrong and we are passing on these harmful messages to our children. Did Uwa, Barakat, Tina, Farishina and countless other women deserve what happened to them? Our religious centres, how many societies do you have for men? When you are having your meetings, what are you discussing there? Are you encouraging yourselves to continue these evil practices? You see what some people comment on social media and you are afraid but it’s not their fault, they don’t know better.”  
  
“Talking about the police is very painful for me, where do I start from? Asides the fact that most police stations don’t have gender desks, the police needs to be re-educated on SGBV. This has become everyone’s business and we must all put hands together to end rape and sexual assault in Nigeria,” she said.  
  
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