Family accuses police of mishandling teen’s assault case, demands justice

Date: 2024-09-27

Source: https://guardian.ng/news/family-accuses-police-of-mishandling-teens-assault-case-demands-justice/

The family of a 13-year-old girl sexual assault survivor (names withheld) has accused the police of poor handling of the matter. The Guardian learned that the Festac Police Division arrested three of the suspects, with one on the run, for allegedly conspiring together and having unlawful carnal knowledge of a 15-year-old minor.  
  
  
  
The survivor’s family, through its counsel, G.E. Anaba, a senior partner of Ruhm & Associates, accused the Lagos State Police Command of reportedly collecting huge sums from the suspects and releasing them on bail.  
  
On behalf of the family, the lawyer petitioned the Lagos State police commissioner, Olarewaju Ishola, asking him to intervene and get justice for the girl. The family also called on the Attorney General of Lagos State, the Director of Public Prosecution, and the Lagos State Ministry of Justice to intervene so that justice would prevail. They also called for the immediate prosecution of the suspects.  
  
The petition reads in part, “We are solicitors to Miss (names withheld), hereinafter referred to as ‘Our Client’. We hereby submit this petition to draw your attention to the grave issue of sexual harassment faced by a 15-year-old girl, which commenced when she just turned 13 years of age at the hands of the above-mentioned persons.  
  
“This incident has not only caused profound psychological harm to the victim but also violated  
  
“We acknowledge that Nigeria has laws aimed at protecting minors from sexual offences, including the Child Rights Act and provisions in the Criminal Law of Lagos State. More particularly, Section 137, Criminal Law of Lagos State, covers defilement of a child: ‘Any person who has unlawful sexual intercourse with a child is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for life.’  
  
  
  
“Section 148 of the Criminal Law of Lagos states that knowledge of the age of the victim is immaterial: ‘Except as otherwise expressly stated, it is immaterial that the defendant did not know that the woman or girl was under that age, or believed that she was not under that age.”  
  
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The petition adds, “We are calling on relevant authorities, including the Lagos State government, law enforcement agencies, and child protection agencies, to take immediate action in this case.  
  
“Specifically, we urge swift legal action and protection of the victim. Sexual harassment and defilement are affronts to human dignity and must be addressed decisively. Children have the right to grow up free from fear and harm.  
  
“We hereby call on the authorities to take swift action against these persons to ensure that justice is served and to protect other potential victims from similar abuse. There are WhatsApp messages (as evidence) exchanged between our client and these perpetrators.”  
  
When contacted, the spokesperson for the Lagos State Police Command, SP Benjamin Hundeyin, said he was aware of the matter and that it had been transferred to the Gender Section for an in-depth investigation.