Kaduna’s bizarre law on rape

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Kaduna’s bizarre law on rape  
  
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SIR: I was still trying to get my head around Zamfara State government’s plans to introduce death sentence for reckless driving when one of its North-western neighbours, Kaduna, came up with a bill recommending total castration for rapist in the state. Why propose archaic capital punishment for civil offences in the 21st century? Making our laws more draconian only makes matters worse. Death sentence for kidnapping has increased kidnappings. Decoupling fine on hate speech has not stopped it but has inadvertently contributed to its inflation.  
  
Before the rapists even get their comeuppance, it is expected that they had gotten a fair hearing in our courts as they are presumed innocent until proven otherwise. This is where the judiciary comes in. Beyond the photo ops of signing a bill, is the Bench ready to prosecute the cases in quick enough time and not render it lost in the haystack of unresolved cases?  
  
What are the plans of Kaduna State Ministry of Justice in ensuring cases are tried with the speed of light? Will more courts and court rooms be built so that rape cases won’t be contesting for time, space and slot in the regular courts? Or would a special tribunal be set up for trial of the suspects? Or will it go with a penal code that sentences a 13-year-old to 10 years in prison?  
  
There is arguably no day without a report of a rape in the metro section of Nigerian tabloids and it is good to know that Kaduna State government has chosen not to fold its hands on this irritating disease that is ravaging the nation. However, instead of Governor Nasir el-Rufai signing another extreme legislation that provides surgical castration for males and bilateral salpingectomy for females convicted of child rape, he should be looking for ways of preventing the crime.  
  
If the Kaduna State government had been more scientific and less dramatic in its approach to stopping this national scourge, they would have noticed that most rapes occur in semi urban and rural areas that are not only at the bottom of the food chain but with women less empowered. What members of the Kaduna State House of Assembly should have done instead of another poorly crafted and verbose bill, is to guarantee those ungoverned bucolic constituencies they represent, feeder roads to transport their farm produce, primary schools to keep those minors that fall victim of rape off the streets, primary healthcare centres to treat their old, electricity to light up their villages from darkness, police post that responds to crimes like rape and internet penetration to be part of the global community.  
  
Mallam el-Rufai should also spread across Northern Nigeria the simple admonition of his very good friend, deposed Emir of Kano, Muhammadu Sanusi II, that, “If you really want to help, go and educate a girl child in the village.”  
  
Unfortunately, the Nigerian society is highly patriarchal and misogynistic which is being reflected in the male-dominated police force that can’t relate with the raped and abused but blames her for dressing seductively (whatever that means), nocturnal or for not being submissive. And so, while bridging the power gap between the man and the woman, police recruitment should not only be based on geo-political balancing but also gender parity to help with the increasing gender violence. It also makes it easier for the rape victim to be able to open up.  
  
Governor el-Rufai has proven himself to be very cerebral since he burst into the national scene about 20 years ago. He should use his membership of several constitutional reform committees to ensure our policing is restructured to be more communal and less central. It doesn’t make investigative sense when we hear rape cases are transferred to a department in Police Headquarters, Abuja, several miles from the crime scene. This makes another rapist go unpunished, thereby emboldening the next guy.  
  
It is societal reengineering and infrastructural development that is required to end rape in Nigeria. No draconian laws made by Nigerian polygamists will stop rape. When socio-economic practices like almajarai and gang groups that sees the male lacking social interaction with the opposite sex, the Nigerian girl will continue to be seen as another asset to be toyed with rather than the better half in race of life. Kaduna and other states in Nigeria are fighting culture not crime.