47 sexual assault referral centers grossly insufficient, says minister

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47 sexual assault referral centers grossly insufficient, says minister  
  
Minister of Women Affairs, Hon Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim has said the existing 47 sexual assault referral centers in the country are grossly insufficient for a population of over 220 million people in the quest to discourage Gender Based Violence (GBV).  
  
She vowed to develop a centralised data platform for tracking interventions on Gender Based Violence (GBV) to ensure targeted and impactful implementation of programmes.  
  
She spoke in keynote address at the High Level Dialogue on Investment in Gender Equality and Ending Violence Against Women for Rights and Development organised by African Development Bank (ADB) and UNWomen at the Bank’s headquarters in Abuja yesterday.  
  
The minister restated President Bola Ahmed Tinubu’s Renewed Hope mandate in protecting women and children.  
  
She promised to address the issue by establishing additional safe spaces for women and girls.  
  
Sulaiman-Ibrahim said: “Under the Renewed Hope Agenda of President Bola Ahmed Tinubu, we have reaffirmed our commitment to gender equality and ending GBV.  
  
“Our effort includes both preventive and responsive measures, with a sharp focus on strengthening the implementation of legal frameworks, providing robust support services, and fostering behavioral change to eliminate the root causes of gender-based violence.  
  
“Globally, gender-based violence (GBV) remains one of the most pervasive human rights violations, with one in three women experiencing physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.  
  
“Take a moment to reflect on the fact that in 2023, an average of 1 woman was killed every 10 minutes by a loved one every day last year.  
  
“In Nigeria, the numbers are equally, if not more, troubling. Reports indicate that 30% of Nigerian women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence, and one in four Nigerian girls has been sexually abused before the age of 18.  
  
“These numbers underscore the harsh realities faced by women and girls every day.  
  
“However, gender equality and the fight against violence against women are not just moral imperatives – they are essential for sustainable development.  
  
“Research has shown that countries with higher levels of gender equality enjoy faster economic growth, better governance, and higher levels of peace and stability.  
  
“The World Bank estimates closing gender gaps in Nigeria could add up to $9.3 billion annually to GDP by 2025.  
  
“Women in Nigeria make up 49 per cent of the population and 41 per cent of Micro, Small, and Medium-Scale Enterprises (MSME) owners.  
  
“Yet less than 22 per cent of women hold senior leadership positions, and only 3.6 per cent occupy parliamentary seats.  
  
“This gross underrepresentation in decision-making stifles growth, innovation, and inclusiveness.”  
  
The minister added that the economic cost of gender-based violence in Nigeria is staggering.  
  
“GBV costs the global economy an estimated $1.5 trillion annually, and in Nigeria, it contributes significantly to lost productivity and public health costs.  
  
“We must view investments in gender equality and GBV prevention not as expenditures but as critical levers for economic resilience and growth.”  
  
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Sulaiman-Ibrahim highlighted five critical areas that must be focused on over the next year:  
  
“Strengthening the technical capacity and level of implementation of existing institutions to ensure that commitments are translated into measurable outcomes.  
  
“Enhancing coordination mechanisms within the sector to foster synergy among stakeholders and reduce duplication of efforts.  
  
“Addressing the absence of quality data to enable evidence-based policy formulation, monitoring, and evaluation.  
  
“Enhancing resource allocation to empower the sector to deliver impactful interventions.  
  
“Strengthening policy implementation to close gaps between laws and on-ground realities.  
  
“As established, to achieve sustainable development, we must focus on intentional investments in women’s empowerment and violence prevention.  
  
“It is therefore critical to allocate resources where they can have the most transformative impact.  
  
“Over the next year, we will, therefore, work with urgency on the following transformative initiatives, among several others:  
  
“Enhance and track the implementation of the Child Rights Act and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act.  
  
“We are glad to note that as of today, Bauchi State has finally domesticated the Child Rights Act (CRA 2003), bringing the total to 36 States, while 35 States have domesticated the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act 2015.  
  
“Establish a National Protection Center for Women and Children to provide holistic services, including legal aid, temporary shelter, and psycho-social support.  
  
“Investing in women’s access to renewable energy and green economy sectors, empowering them to lead climate adaptation and economic resilience initiatives.  
  
“On Education, we will work collaboratively with the relevant stakeholders to address the fact that 10.5 million Nigerian children are out of school, 60 per cent of whom are girls.  
  
“Education is a powerful tool to break cycles of poverty and violence.  
  
“On Health and Social Protections: we will support efforts to tackle Nigeria’s maternal mortality ratio of 512 deaths per 100,000 live births and expand access to healthcare and trauma counselling services for GBV survivors.  
  
“On Economic Empowerment, we will work on the full implementation of the Women Economic Empowerment Policy and build on the success of the Nigeria for Women Project, which has disbursed over ₦19 billion to over 400,000 rural women.  
  
“We will work with state governments and other partners to ensure the rapid implementation and scale-up of this very important project. We will also work to plug Nigerian women in trade into the African Continental Free Trade Area Agreement to unlock new economic opportunities and contribute to the continent’s growth and development.”  
  
The event which was well attended had the wife of Kwara State Governor, Professor Olufolake Abdul-Razaq, Princess Adejoke Orelope Adefulire, Senior Special Assistant to the President on SDG’s, Ambassador of Mexico to Nigeria, His Excellency, Mr Alfredo Miranda Ortiz, Deputy Ambassador, European Union Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Mr Zissimos Vergos and the United Nations Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator in Nigeria, His Excellency, Mohammed Malik Fall, among others.