‘Number of boys, men suffering from gender-based violence on increase’

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‘Number of boys, men suffering from gender-based violence on increase’  
  
The International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (International IDEA) has stated that Nigeria cannot promote and achieve sustainable democracy and good governance without tackling the worrying issues of sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).  
  
The institute noted that while women and girls are the most vulnerable and susceptible to SGBV, and need to be supported and protected, it noted that there was an increasing number of boys and men who suffer from SGBV – who also need to be protected.  
  
It, therefore, urged all critical stakeholders, including the government at the Federal and State level, civil society organisations, private sector, and others, to deepen collaboration to accelerate progress towards ending SGBV in Nigeria.  
  
The Director, Africa and West Asia Region, International IDEA, Dr. Roba Sharamo disclosed this in an interview in Abuja, during the 10th Network Conference of Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) organised by the Rule of Law and Anti-corruption (RoLAC) Programme, in collaboration with the Federal Ministry of Justice Sexual and Gender-based Violence Response Unit.  
  
He said: “The conference is part of the activities to commemorate the 16 days of activism this year, and various studies we have done, including the women in political participation environment, produced by International IDEA this year, that shows that one of the key factors preventing women from getting into politics is the sexual and gender-based violence against women candidates, and also the issues of abuse on social media, that continues to undermine the effective participation of women in that regard.  
  
“It is important to understand that as we try to promote democracy and good governance, we cannot do that in an environment that is hostile to more than half of the African population, which are women. It is, therefore, important that we look at the issues of SGBV.  
  
“SGBV against women is not just a serious human rights issue and justice issue, the increasing number of boys and men who suffer from sexual and gender-based violence does not also diminish the focus on the same.”  
  
Stating the importance of the Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs), and their achievements since their establishment, Sharamo said: “The first SARC, the Mirabel Centre, was established in 2018, to offer a safe environment for survivors of sexual assault, and the data that we have shows that of the 47 SARCs established across 22 states, 51,127 survivors have been assisted through the various centres since 2013.  
  
“With more centres being established, the conference of the Network of SARCs since 2016, continues to look at all the achievements that we continue to make.”  
  
In his remarks, Deputy Ambassador, European Union Delegation to Nigeria and ECOWAS, Zissimos Vergos stated that gender-based violence was not a ‘women’s issue,’ but an issue of all of society, hence, combating it required the whole society approach.  
  
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He noted that while prevention was key to breaking the vicious cycle that perpetuates violence, protection ensures safeguarding and the immediate wellbeing of survivors.  
  
He said: “Speaking openly about gender-based violence still can be a huge risk for survivors. The EU supports the creation of an environment where women and children are not only encouraged, but also empowered to break the silence.  
  
“The EU’s commitment to addressing these issues, promoting gender equality, and strengthening support systems, underscores the determination to ensure that every survivor’s voice is heard and respected.”  
  
Vergos, while stating that access to justice and care for survivors of SGBV must remain a top priority, decried the low number of cases of SGBV that are prosecuted, compared to the number of survivors.  
  
He, therefore, called on the government to take ownership of the campaign against SGBV by allocating more funding and ensuring that SGBV units at designated institutions have all that they require to address the needs of the people.  
  
“We like to express the EU’s appreciation to the Nigerian government represented by the Ministry of Women Affairs and Justice, for the strong partnership demonstrated. We will continue to work side-by-side, and always guided by Nigerian policies and under Nigerian leadership, moving towards a more gender-sensitive society.  
  
“The EU remains committed to the course of the fight against SGBV, which remains one of the pillars for rebuilding humanity in the 21st century,” he said.  
  
Minister of Women Affairs and SocialDevelopment, Hajia Imaan Sulaiman-Ibrahim who was represented by Director, Women Development in the ministry, Mrs. Friya Bulus said that the SGBV campaign this year will afford the government, development partners, civil society organisations, and the private sector the opportunity to accelerate progress towards ending violence against women and girls.  
  
“The campaign this year is to ensure sustained advocacy, raise awareness about gender-based violence, despite previous efforts made, and mobilise more stakeholders to take action against gender-based violence, and to provide support services to gender-based survivors,” she said.