

Parliament Inquiry into Gender Based Violence

Gender Based Violence (GBV) against women is a major social problem in our society which must be adequately addressed with ongoing commitment and support by relevant government, church and non-government organizations. The statistics of two in three women experiencing GBV is a cause of concern and solutions should be proffered to address this issue so that the value and dignity of women and their active participation in nation building would be restored in the family and in all sphere of life in our society. The establishment of the Parliamentary Committee on GBV is the right approach by the Government in taking the lead in the political arena to address GBV issues for the benefit and prosperity of our nation. I wish to address the specific Terms of Reference of the Inquiry.

a) Broader issues connected to GBV and the root causes

- When women become victims of GBV, the consequences are complex which affects every area of their lives because women's existence are interwoven into the stability and fabric of the society. Human life and its sustenance will be unbalanced when women are hurt and wounded emotionally, mentally and physically. Family planning cannot be controlled when women are subject to pressure from their husbands.
- **Gender equality**
GBV creates the illusion to the general public that gender equality does not exist. However, the truth of matter is that male and female are equal in creation and they are equally important in their unique roles concerning family and partners in national development.
- **Women's economic empowerment**
When women experience GBV, their ability to engage in economic activities are weakened because of the physical, emotional and mental pain they endure which affect the way they think, feel and respond to life.
- **Women's political participation**
Women's aspiration to participate in politics is hampered as a result of contrary cultural belief systems that undervalues women as inferior to the masculine society. Traditional and some faulty religious beliefs has over the years tarnished the mindsets of the people to wrongly believe that men are more important than the women and women cannot become leaders in the society.
- **Root causes of GBV**
The root causes of GBV is due mainly to ignorance and misunderstanding of the value, dignity and uniqueness of the female gender. Men reacts to violence because of the faulty belief system that shaped their character and attitude. Defective belief systems that originates from cultural and religious traditions produces ignorance and misunderstanding which are the root causes of GBV.

(b) The immediate and long-term measures to prevent gender based violence with the focus on behavioural change for future generations:

(i) Immediate measures:

- Awareness should be targeting the male population concerning the value, dignity, uniqueness and purpose of women in the family and society. Similarly, men must also be made aware of their unique difference in relation to their role towards women, family and society.
- Counselling services should be made accessible in institutions and work places to help men change their mindset towards women.

(ii) Long-term measures

- Citizenship Christian Value Education curriculum should be taught by trained Christian teachers or Christian leaders in schools.
- FSVU should have the service of committed family counsellors
- Chaplain positions should be created in the public and private sectors to address various spiritual, emotional and mental issue of employees.

(c) The level and impact of coordination and accountability for service and policy response across the government departments, Police, Courts, provincial and local level government, NGO's and private sector should be strengthened and improved by:

- Proper structure and effective system of operation
- Trained and committed officers who work with passion and are focused to solve GBV related issues.

(d) The adequacy of evidences and prevalence date of GBV cases should be organized in a way that information is centralized and linked with relevant stakeholders. Trained and committed personnel with adequate funding will help overcome any limitations in data collection.

(e) The perpetrator intervention programs and support services to help them change their behaviour should include:

- Access to Counselling services
- Perpetrators need to be restored holistically
- Perpetrators need change of values

(f) Genuine frontline services, advocacy groups and others working to address gender based violence are committed to their task because it is their area of passion and calling. Those who are genuine and produce results should be supported and resourced properly so that they can continue to roll out their programs with specific goals to address the issue of GBV.

(g) The Covid-19 pandemic has also contributed to the rise of GBV cases within many communities both in the urban and rural areas. Due to the loss of job and restricted income earning opportunities, many women were subjected to violence by their husbands. The variety of notable cases observed are:

- Women assaulted by their husbands because they would not to release money they have saved to buy food for the family.
- Women assaulted by their husbands because they had misused their family money or given it out to help other family members without the husband's knowledge.
- Women harassed by law enforcement authorities for selling their foodstuff at public places schools and even outside their home premises.
- Women abused emotionally by law enforcement officers destroying their food items
- Women assaulted by their husband because of promiscuity due to financial hardship.

In the midst of the ongoing Covid-19 situation, the Government and other stakeholders should relax restrictions based upon the actual ground level situation we are currently in. Women should be allowed to venture into income generating activities with observance of health protocols.

The ban on selling near school premises should be lifted so women can sell proper dietary food to the children.

(h) Women's leadership role in response to GBV should be supported by the various stakeholders. Women who have experienced GBV and have the passion to take leading roles should be assisted well in their preparation spiritually, emotionally and mentally.

Those who aspire for political office should also be prepared well in all aspects of politics and leadership before they can become potential candidates.

The temporary provision of special seats for women in Parliament should be activated by the Government to allow women to participate as equal partners in political leadership. During the duration of the temporary provision for the special seat in Parliament, women politicians should prove to the national that women are equally capable to become politicians and contribute to building a prosperous nation.

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