

The African Legal Think Tank on Women's Rights supports in the strongest terms the coalition of Civil Society Organizations calling for the declaration of a State of Emergency on SGBV in Nigeria.

The African Legal Think Tank on Women's Rights (ALTOWR) is following with tremendous concern the rise of systemic violence towards women and children in the Federal Republic of Nigeria. We condemn the horrendous episodes of rape, domestic violence and abuses, and join in solidarity the coalition of Civil Society Organizations calling for the declaration of a State of Emergency on SGBV in Nigeria.

Recent data show that violence against women and children has pervasively increased during the current novel COVID-19 pandemic, with serious consequences for the victims, the families, the community and the country at large. It is nonetheless concerning the response from the general public, which is confining the cases of rape, abuses and domestic violence as a drastic consequence of the preventive measures undertaken by the Federal Republic of Nigeria to contrast the pandemic. Cognisant that the lockdown has forced victims to remain isolated with their abusers, as data from service providers have reported a drastic increase of cases, we wish to duly emphasize that the Pandemic has weakened an already enfeebled system attributed to a pervasive culture of impunity, which is unable to properly address violence against women and children, with devastating consequences towards the pre-existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, further affecting the most vulnerable groups, including women and girls with disabilities, in conflict-affected states, refugees and internally displaced.

The weak system of the Federal Republic of Nigeria is further affected by the societal, cultural and religious response to the cases of violence towards women and children, which often lead to victim-blaming. Such attitudes have led to devastating effects in ensuring access to Justice for the victims, further exacerbated by the political discourse. In fact, survivors are often unable to report cases due to the stigma and fear of discrimination, ensuring that cases of SGBV are grossly underreported. We wish to reiterate that the police should not be used in any form or manner as a tool of oppression and power abuse, serving a privileged elite to silence, threaten and intimidate women. This repeated high-handedness by the police, instead of thorough investigation further deters survivors of SGBV from reporting their abusers.



We are seriously concerned by the absence of a prompt and clear institutional response, along with the conduct of public officials in dealing with such cases. We duly recall to state prosecutors that they are entrusted with representing the State and the public interest before the legal and judicial institutions, and as such they shall ensure that Justice is ensured to the victims of such horrific crimes. We condemn any attempt and form of mediation, and we recall that rape is duly criminalized under the Criminal and Penal Code, along with State Laws, the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) and the ratified Human Rights Instruments, such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

We, therefore, urge

- The Federal Republic of Nigeria to declare a State of Emergency on SGBV in Nigeria;
- The States of the Federal Capital Territory to duly engage with Legal Experts, Civil Society Organizations and Activists to define an institutional response to SGBV. We urge the States to comprehensively design with Legal Experts an effective judicial response, tailored to the current public health emergency. Furthermore, we urge the States to comprehensively assess and design proper data collection mechanisms;
- The Criminalization and prompt state-led prosecution of SGBV cases within states, regardless of requests or interference by the victim's family or interested parties.
- The Federal Republic of Nigeria to initiate a comprehensive assessment of the public officials' responses on such cases and ensure effective actions, including developing ad-hoc training to the Police Force;
- The domestication of the Violence Against Persons Prohibition (VAPP) Act and Child Rights Act in all states of the federation;
- The implementation of the Ratified Human Rights Instruments;
- Donor Programs to duly fund frontline services to ensure effective response and protection of the victims;
- The prompt and efficient dissemination of information for remote communities, and peculiarly for women and girls, unable to access information remotely;

The African Legal Think Tank on Women's Rights (ALTOWR) remains at disposal of the Civil Society Organizations, Activists and the Federal Republic of Nigeria to ensure that violence against women and girls is duly and promptly addressed.

