

Government launches Sexual, Gender based Violence Unit

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By **MUHAMMED S. BAH**

The Ministry of Justice on Wednesday 28th November launched a Unit to look into the affairs of Sexual and Gender Base Violence in the country.

The Unit comprises of 15 personnel, 10 of whom are from the Ministry of Justice, 2 from the police prosecution unit, 2 from the Police Gender Unit and one from the department of Social Welfare under the Ministry of Health.

This unit is expected to look into the issues of sexual and gender-based violence in the country, investigate and fast track justice for victims. Also, it is expected to sensitize, rehabilitate and counsel victims that have undergone violations.

In his launching statement at a Local Hotel in Banjul, the Vice President Ousainou Darboe said the establishment of the unit is timely.

The Vice President underscored the issue of Sexual and Gender based violence as a menace that has been battled by actors for many years.

"Sexual and Gender based violence remains a problem, despite government initiatives to create legislation to combat this menace," Mr. Darboe cited.

He said that after the ratification of international laws and relevant treaties that protects people from Gender based violence, the government of the Gambia has domesticated these treaties for the promotion and the protection of the rights of women and children.

He said, "The Women's Act 2010, Children's Act 2005 amendment in 2016, Domestic Violence Act 2013, Sexual Offences Act 2013 are all part of legislative frame work for the fight against sexual and gender-based violence in the country".

He however pointed that having the legislative framework alone will not have the desired impact on sexual and gender based violence. He said, "Therefore we must blend legislative measures with policies and strategies that will not only raise awareness about the path of women and children, but which also leave no doubt in anybody's mind that the law will be enforced to protect the most vulnerable in our society."

The act of Sexual and Gender based violence is under reported and that women and children are more vulnerable, so the need for their targeted protection is therefore questionable.

Speaking on behalf of the Inspector General of Police, Assistant Inspector General Ebrima Bah highlighted the importance of partnership with the police and the relevant stakeholders in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence.

He said the police have taken the issues of sexual and gender-based violence as priority over the past years, that led to the establishment of a unit dealing with sexual and gender-based violence.

He added that the unit ensures that sexual and gender-based violence matters are handled with utmost urgency and confidentiality.

Sharon Wardle the British high Commissioner in the Gambia said the timing of the launch of the unit is remarkable as it coincides with the 16 days of global activism against gender base violence.

Madam Wardle said all means necessary should be used to combat sexual and gender-based violence.

"Which means government, civil society organisations, international organisations coming together to pledge never to sweep it under the carpet," she remarked.

Haddy Mboge, Coordinator of Network of Gender Based Violence on her part briefly highlighted the work her network is doing to fighting against gender-based violence since its inception in 2009.

She said the network comprises of Civil Society Organisations, and public intuitions.

She however pointed out some of the challenges that are faced in the fight against sexual and gender-based violence, which she said, includes reporting cases on time at health facilities. She also cited the inadequate facilities from the various hospitals such as conducting DNA tests to establish the fact and also inadequate legal support to victims.

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