

77 of 166 DOCUMENTS

Africa News

May 5, 2008 Monday

## Uganda; We Just Can't Let These Defilers Off the Hook

**BYLINE:** The Monitor

**LENGTH:** 661 words

The case of Ms Namusoga (not real name for respect of the girl's privacy), the 13-year-old disabled girl who gave birth last week in Iganga after being defiled by an unknown pedophile has once again brought to the fore the growing problem of child abuse in the country.

Apart from being underage, Namusoga is blind, crippled and deaf. But her condition did not stop a senseless man from defiling her- leading to an unwanted pregnancy that could only impair the victim further. Imagine the physical torture and mental anguish of this little girl who could not see nor protest against the criminal acts of her tormentor.

And it cannot help matters either if it's established that in this specific case, the grisly sexual assault was carried out by a family relative. The fact that the girl was crippled after a severe attack of a curable disease- malaria is also testament to the gross violation of children's rights in poor developing countries like Uganda .

Defilement is the leading form of violence against the girl child in Uganda, according to human and child rights organisations. Strangely though, most defilement cases are settled at family level even when the offence of aggravated defilement like in the case of Namusoga carry a mandatory death penalty on conviction.

This means that the wider Ugandan society does not take defilement as a serious offence. In most cases the offenders are let off the hook after an exchange of small material gifts. In other cases, the defiled children's dignity is traded for one or two goats. This is sad to say the least.

But what's child abuse?

In simple terms this is any mistreatment or neglect of a child that results in non-accidental harm or injury and which cannot be reasonably explained. Child abuse include physical, emotional and sexual abuse and neglect.

We don't want to pass judgement here, but why would the relatives of this disabled young girl leave her at home alone? This is the kind of inhuman treatment that most disabled persons experience in their daily lives. Society looks upon them as outcasts. For goodness' sake disability does not extinguish a person's fundamental rights to live a health, happy and decent life.

According to social workers and human rights activists, among the factors that contribute to child abuse include lack of parenting skills, unrealistic expectations about children's behaviour and capabilities, a parent's own negative childhood experience, social isolation etc. Child abuse therefore is a symptom that parents/guardians -whoever is in care of a child are having a difficulty coping with the obligation imposed by a duty of care for the young ones.

Ugandans should therefore wake up and stand firm to fight one of the worst forms of human torture and brutal crime of child defilement. All of us have a responsibility to ensure children are safe whether they are our relatives or not . There is a community responsibility to nurture, protect and guide the young generation to grow up and become responsible citizens.

The law governing the welfare of children especially those with disabilities imposes a strict responsibility on the parents and the state to afford children with disabilities facilities for their rehabilitation and care by provision of equal opportunities.

But there is an urgent need for parliament to re-examine and harmonise the laws that govern the welfare of children . The Children and Penal Code Acts are particularly lacking when it comes to child abuse related offences.

The law for instance should punish parents/relatives who conspire with defilers to defeat justice by not reporting defilement cases to the authorities. The penalties provided for in the Children Act for child abuse offences are too weak to have a meaningful deterrent effect.

The country owes this little girl, Namusoga, a debt that would possibly never be paid. Defilement is horrible and inhuman and it must be fought by every sensible citizen.

The writer is a journalist and advocate.

**LOAD-DATE:** May 6, 2008

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**PUBLICATION-TYPE:** Newsletter