



## **The National Human Rights Commission, The Gambia**

### **PRESS STATEMENT**

**Date: 13<sup>th</sup> April 2021**

**RHP58/154/01(LF-05)**

### **URGENT NEED TO END THE SPATE OF SEXUAL AND GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN OUR SOCIETY**

The National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) is deeply perturbed by the spate of rape and other forms of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the country. Hardly a week passes by without the report of sexual violence against the female gender in the newspapers or on social media. A few days ago, it was the alleged rape of a 9-year-old girl by a 40-year-old man in Lamin, West Coast Region and the alleged rape and gruesome murder of a Grade 12 student in Busumbala. Our young girls and ladies are apparently not safe in their own homes, schools, on the streets and at the workplaces.

A study on sexual harassment in the workplace in the Gambia, conducted by the NHRC in February 2021, indicates a high prevalence (74 per cent) of sexual harassment in our workplaces, especially in role allocation, promotion and employment seeking. Disproportionately but unsurprisingly, women form the majority of the victims and the workplace is the most identified location where the harassment occurs. The three highest types of workplace harassment are sexually suggestive comments and jokes, inappropriate staring and leering and the repeated or inappropriate invitation to go out on dates. The Demographic and Health Survey 2013 and the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) 2018 both showed the disturbing prevalence of sexual and gender-based violence in our society.

The NHRC regards all forms of sexual and gender-based violence as a serious violation of human rights and reprehensible abuse of power and authority and the highest betrayal of trust. As a statutory body mandated to promote and protect the rights of everyone within the Gambia, the NHRC strongly urges the State, as the primary duty bearer, to take every legal measure and action to combat sexual abuse, violence and exploitation in the society.

The NHRC further urges the Gambia Police Force to vigorously enforce the Children's Act 2005, Sexual Offences Act 2013 and all other legislation that protect children and women from sexual violence and for the Ministry of Justice to ensure that alleged offenders are prosecuted. The laws must be enforced by investigating alleged perpetrators and successfully prosecuting the offenders. It is only in this way that impunity would be challenged and people's confidence in the laws restored.

In the same vein, we called on the Ministries of Health and Gender, Children and Social Welfare to intensify their efforts in the building of a more protective environment for victims

of sexual violence. Essential services, including health, psychosocial and rehabilitation and reintegration programmes must be in place to support victims and survivors.

While the NHRC appreciates the great efforts of the Media, including social media, in exposing these abuses and violations, we urge them to always bear in mind the best interest of the victims and strict observance of its ethical standards in the reporting of sexual and gender-based violence and children's issues. The privacy, honour and dignity of the victims and survivors should always be given primary consideration.

As a society, there is the need for us to begin serious conversations at all levels on the factors which engender sexual and gender-based violence and our individual roles in its perpetuation. We must interrogate those aspects of our culture, including patriarchy, which subordinate women, perpetuate masculinity and blame and cast aspersion on victims for their abuse and violations and encourage everyone especially our girls, women and children to report all forms of sexual and gender-based violence that they are subjected to or know about to the appropriate authorities.

The NHRC understands that there are factors that inhibit victims and witnesses from reporting cases to the Police or other statutory bodies. To safeguard confidence in our protection system, statutory bodies with obligations to protect must ensure that cases are expeditiously investigated and perpetrators prosecuted for their crimes and that victims and whistleblowers are protected from victimization.

The NHRC will continue to engage all the critical stakeholders and duty bearers to map out strategies for the effective protection of victims and survivors and to put an end to the impunity which has dampened confidence in our protection system. We must do more for the vulnerable members of our society and the protection of girls, women and children is paramount.

Signed: Emmanuel D. Joof

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Emmanuel D. Joof', written over a light purple rectangular background.

Chairperson