



**REMARKS BY THE HONOURABLE MINISTER OF WOMEN AFFAIRS,
DAME PAULINE TALLEN, OFR. KSG AT THE MEDIA BRIEFING HELD
ON MONDAY, 8TH JUNE, 2020, AT THE MINISTRY'S CONFERENCE
ROOM, ABUJA**

Protocols

I thank you for honouring my invitation to this media briefing despite the short notice. This briefing is crucial in view of the National outcry that trailed the gory events leading to the death of so many young girls and women in different parts of the country by some mindless individuals. This event also heralds activities of the upcoming 2020 Day of the African Child - 16th June and they are so relevant in the anticipated progress we aim to achieve.

2. The Day of the African Child - 16th June provides an occasion for Governments, International Institutions and Communities to renew their on-going commitments towards improving the plight of children. The last few days have been very depressing and distressing for me and obviously, for many women and girls, as well as men and boys across this country. Every day, as you tune to radio station, television station, flip open newspaper pages or click on social media pages, it is one crazy incidence of rape or other forms of Sexual and Gender-Based violence (SGBV). The rape of babies, toddlers, adolescent girls and women of all ages has reached an embarrassing and alarming rate that urgent steps need to be taken to properly address this hydra-headed pandemic that threatens our country's beautiful image in the comity of Nations; and an urgent need to act now is highly recommended.

3. My initial message on the rising incidences of Sexual and Gender-Based violence was precisely to address a report that was brought to my attention of violations by fathers and intimate partner abuse, as a result of some measures taken by the Federal Government to flatten the curve of COVID-19 pandemic. One of such is the lockdown, where victims were locked in with their abusers, with no respite in sight. This was further made worse as SGBV interventions were not classified under essential services. Let me use this opportunity to formally thank all members of Civil Society Organizations, who took it upon themselves to save the lives of these victims

at the peak of the lockdown. The media was also very magnanimous in reporting these cases. For this, I thank you all and implore all stakeholders to support us.

4. The theme of the 2020 Day of the African Child "**Access to a Child-Friendly Justice System in Africa**" further strengthens our advocacy to demand for justice for those who have lost their lives and those who have lost their dignity as a result of violence meted out to them. We remember today with pains in our hearts the rape of the 12 years old girl by 11 men in Jigawa State and the rape of a 4 years old girl by her school teacher.

5. What can I say about the rape and eventual death of Uwaila Omozuwa, a 22 years old, one hundred level microbiology student, of the University of Benin, which took place in a Church in Benin City, Edo State Capital, while she was reading; the rape and murder of Barakat Bello, a 19 years old student of the Institute of Agriculture, Research and Training, Ibadan, Oyo State, in her Father's house; Joy Adoki, a 400 level student of the Department of Management Science, University of Port Harcourt, Rivers State, who was raped, murdered and buried in a shallow grave by her assailant. Only yesterday, we again received the news of the rape and murder of Mrs. Queen Igbinevho, the pregnant wife of a politician in Benin City, Edo State. Her attackers were said to have gained entrance into her home through the ceiling. The list is endless. May their souls rest in peace. My heart goes out to their families and other families dealing with this kind of tragedy at this time.

6. I have been in touch with key officials in the different states where these events took place. I found out- even before my calls, each case was being treated with urgency and officials have been hands-on. I will continue to speak to the relevant authorities until each case receives the magnitude of attention they deserve respectively.

7. The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, President Muhammadu Buhari, *GCFR* has condemned these acts in all their ramifications. The Nigerian Senate has been swift in urging "all the State Houses of Assembly to make the punishment for Rapists more stringent," to serve as deterrent to perpetrators involved in the act; while directing Security Agencies in the Country to enforce the Child Rights Act, as it affects girl-child marriage following a motion titled, "**increasing cases of rape and brutality against the girl child in Nigeria.**" Equally, asking the Federal Government to stage aggressive campaigns against the increasing brutality and rape of the girl child in the country, is a welcomed development, as it gives my Ministry the desired legislative backing, in further championing my advocacy drive around the issues. The House of Representatives has also come out to

condemn these horrific acts and called on our lawmakers to take emergency actions on this unacceptable dastardly oppression that has engulfed the country like a sudden ignited flame.

8. At this juncture, let me say that all concerns raised as to what the Ministry is doing to address the issues at this point are valid. I appreciate all the voices holding this Ministry accountable, I assure you that we see, feel and hear you. Our efforts are not just to repair what is broken right now, but to establish a dependable security for the future.

9. Let me reassure you that the Ministry is aware of how vulnerable Nigerian children, especially the girl-child is at this time, and the record of cases being reported indeed stirs rage. With support from President Muhammadu Buhari, we are confronting these issues from all angles: Policies, Legislature and Regulations, to create a Nigerian society that is safe for every child, especially the girl-child and women, while building systems that are efficient, effective, reliable and sustainable.

10. In view of the urgent steps needed to make progress, we have convened a virtual Meeting with State Commissioners of Women Affairs and CSOs to re-strategize towards combating all forms of violence against women, especially rape, abuse and sexual exploitation of women and girls, as well as develop a Road map that will respond to curbing this menace.

11. As a Ministry, we are poised to reach out to all and sundry to ensure justice is served. We are therefore, advocating for the establishment of a Special Courts that will summarily prosecute offenders without delay. Upscaling and popularizing of the Sex Offenders Registers to enable it to achieve its goal. We also need to expand existing Temporary Shelters for women victims of abuse and build new ones where they do not exist across the country.

12. Riding on the current favourable political will, we will upscale our advocacy drive to all stakeholders to ensure the domestication and implementation of the VAPP Act and the Child Rights Act in all States of the country. To achieve this, the Ministry will continue to build stronger partnerships and forge alliances with CSOs and other stakeholders, including the private sector to raise funds to sustain the activities of the Ministry, and CSOs working in this area in the face of dwindling economic resources occasioned by the effects of COVID-19 pandemic. This funding will go a long way to implement the activities around the issues raised. It would be recalled that measures put in place to flatten the curve of the pandemic have led to an enormous rise in Gender-Based Violence in the country.

13. At the beginning of the year, we had declared 2020 as **Call to Action for Nigerian Children and Women** because of the promises the year held for them based on the significance of the year to global events. It marked the 25th Anniversary of the Fourth World Conference on Women and the adoption of the 1995 Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action; five years milestone in the drive to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals, (SDGs), 2030 Agenda and the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security. It has marked the 30th Anniversary of the African Charter of the Rights and Welfare of the Child commemoration, 31st Anniversary of the adoption of the Child Rights Act, as well as plans to organize the National Children's Summit. It was therefore, expected to be a pivotal year for the accelerated realization of gender equality and the empowerment of all women and children in Nigeria. But due to the ravaging effects of COVID-19 pandemic, most of the events were put on hold.

14. As we were smarting from the effects of COVID-19, we were again hit by this spate of rapes and murders across the country. I want to send a very loud signal to these mindless criminals that they can run, but they cannot hide as the long arm of the law will catch up with them. We will not be distracted; we will continue to innovate to create the much-needed landscape to achieve our goals.

15. In view of the lean resources available at this time, we can no longer work in silos. Let me use this opportunity to reassure all members of Civil Society Organizations of this administration's commitment under President Muhammadu Buhari, *GCFR*, to support your efforts to help us build a Nigeria safe for all. We must therefore continue to build synergy to address the issue of rape and other related matters. I have also appealed to the Commissioners of Women Affairs to work more closely with CSOs in this regard. Looking at the trends and patterns in the issues of sexual and gender-based violence, it is obvious that there is need for more community engagement. In this regard, we reach out to all critical stakeholders and community gatekeepers in this regard. I wish to appeal to all our Development partners to support our efforts to improve coordination of the sector.

16. Let me use this opportunity to commend the visionary leadership of His Excellency, the Governor of Ekiti State, H.E. Dr. John Kayode Fayemi and the role played by his wife H.E Erelu Bisi Fayemi in signing into law the **Compulsory Treatment and Care for Child Victims of Sexual Violence Bill, 2020**. This is timely. The Law not only supports prompt medical care for child victims of sexual violence, but also the effective prosecution of sex

offenders. As the Chairman of the Governors Forum, I pray that he uses his skills to convince his colleagues to do same.

17. In the same vein, I want to commend the Northern State Governors for taking a collective decision to end the Almajiri system completely. Almajiri children are vulnerable and deserve better deals. It is good to return them to their States, but we were not happy at the manner and mode of their transportation. I pray that they are properly rehabilitated and reunited with their parents, while plans are also made to enroll them in schools. I want to use this opportunity to appreciate the efforts His Excellency, Mallam Nasir El-Rufai, Executive Governor of Kaduna State, for taking the lead in this regard.

18. In the bid to calm the raging outcry, pacify the victims of the pains they have endured, restore their self-esteem and fate in the authorities, preserve their dignity and create a society, where the safety of our women and children is guaranteed, we will as a matter of urgency, convene a National Virtual Town Hall Meeting on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence to enhance coherence and complementarity to improve synergy with all sectors. As soon as we conclude all logistics arrangements, we will inform you of the date. In the meantime, I have set up an E-Emergency Committee with members drawn from Government and CSOs. This Committee has already provided some insights to the challenges encountered in securing justice for victims and survivors from security operatives, health personal, community gate keepers and even from parents.

19. The commemoration of the Day of the African Child this year as with other events will be virtual and will feature various activities to include presentation by States in the categories of Songs, Poetry Recitation, Essay writing, Panel discussions, Media appearances, etc.

20. Going forward, some of our actions will include:

- i. Upscale our advocacy drive to all stakeholders in the country to get their buy-in to rid the society of this monster;
- ii. Recognizing the importance of data addressing gender gaps in COVID-19 response and recovery programmes, with support from UN Women, we are conducting a mapping of State-level interventions on COVID-19 to strengthen our efforts to ensure the gender-responsiveness of all Federal and State level interventions, to ensure that no woman or girl is left behind.

- iii. UNDP has also supported us to launch the National Gender-Based Violence Data Collation Tool, the first of its kind, to ease the dearth of GBV data in the country, with directives that every partner and stakeholder should use the tool to collate and submit GBV data to the Ministry for uniformity, effective coordination and planning.
- iv. Working with the coalition of the Chambers of Commerce in Nigeria and SME.ng commissioned a National Survey on the Impact of Covid-19 on women-owned Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises in Nigeria as a first step towards planning proper and coordinated interventions for them by stakeholders and by social impact investors.
- v. Advocating for the setting up a Specialized Fund to address Gender-Based Violence to ensure sustainability of on-going initiatives with contributions from the public and private sector;
- vi. Establishing Specialized Courts with deadlines to treat all cases of rape & gender-based violence with dispatch;
- vii. Establish Safe Home Shelters to provide immediate respite for victims of Gender-Based Violence to ensure their safety;

21. As we anticipate for the reopening of schools in the event of the complete lifting of the lockdown, we will sustain the **"One Million Girls Pad Distribution Campaign"** to encourage the increase in enrollment, retention and completion rate of girls in school.

22. Let me conclude by saying justice delayed is justice denied and posterity will judge us if we do not act now. Therefore, I say **"Justice for all"**.

22. Thank you for your attention!