

## WORKSHOP PRESENTATIONS

# Combating gender-based violence

*Excerpts from an address presented by the Coordinator, GPI South East zone, Calabar at the end of year activities workshop to mark the 16 days of action on violence against women on Saturday, December 11, 1999 at the Paradise City Hotel, Calabar*

**S**ixteen (16) days of activism against gender violence, which begins from November 25 to December 10, is an annual event all over the world. This year's event (1999) is the ninth annual campaign. Today, November 25 is marked as the International Day Against Violence Against Girls and Women. This day was first declared by the first feminist encuentro for Latin America and the Caribbean in 1981.

November 25 commemorates the murder of the Mirable sisters by the Trujillo dictatorship in El-Salvador on November 25, 1960. December 1 marks the World AIDS Day while December 10 marks the International Human Rights Day as the anniversary of the signing of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948 by the United Nations.

Within this period also is the anniversary of the Montreal massacre, December 6 when in 1989 a man gunned down fourteen (14) women engineering students for being feminists. For recognizing the various social, political and economic prejudices against girls and women and dedicating themselves to struggle against the oppression and discrimination against women, and creating awareness for the elimination of the various forms of violence against girls and women, this heinous and senseless murder was committed on the 14 innocent students who only tried to show that women's rights are human rights.

Thus the period of November 25 to December 10, highlights very significant dates when girls and women all over the world paid the maximum prize for asserting their rights as human beings. Hence, GPI chooses this period because

of its significance to the activities of GPI to celebrate its end of year as well as join other activists the world over to draw attention to the issue of inhumane treatment and absurd discrimination, that has no scientific basis, against girls and women. We ask that everyone takes five minutes everyday to ask himself or herself why certain things are said and



*GPI S. E. Coordinator, Bene Madunagu delivering her address as she is flanked by the Chairperson, GPI Board of Trustee, Prof. Eka Braide (left) and a GPI Parent (right) who were special guests at the occasion*

done differently to females, and relate such to his/her daily realities and honestly see if such discrimination makes sense in practical terms and in the experiences in our daily life.

One of the attributes of human beings is ability to think and reflect. Animals learn to repeat things they have been taught or programmed to do. It is not human to only do and say, what you have been taught to do and say without reflecting and critically examining and questioning the rational behind such practices. When you casually say "oh she is just a girl", do you mean that she has no eyes, ears, brain, hands, legs etc. or is it because you hear such utterances from others around you and you do not

stop to reflect and ask yourself why such a statement? If you are a victim of such, it is not late now to stop being a mere animal. You owe yourself the duty of becoming a human being. When you say - "she cannot do it because she is a woman", is it because what needs to be done requires the organ that differentiates male from female or

because you hear people say so or you grew up to see it so? Can you take one minute and think of things you never saw when you grew up but you now enjoy because you have the opportunity to be exposed to such? Why do you enjoy ice cream, airconditioner, being in a car rather than the long

trekking you were used to when you were young? Are you being honest therefore when you say it is our culture? Why select the ones that benefit you and hold on to the ones that oppress and dehumanise women and girls.

Violence against girls and women occurs in all aspects of their lives. Women and girls are subjected to abuses of their civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights. Girls and women face **Violence in the family, Violence in the community and Violence by State**

On our part as girls and women and in collaboration with the media, and networking with other NGOs, we will

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# **Combating gender-based violence**

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continue to research and document the various forms of violence and educate girls and women to assert their rights while advocating for legal reforms for the elimination of gender based violence.

We therefore urge the government at various levels: local, State and Federal to legislate or review or enforce laws on harmful traditional practices such as FGM, wife inheritance, property rights, bride price and child marriage. Government should also take the lead in practicing gender equality and equity in its structures, educational and job opportunities.

We call for judicial enquiry into the reported cases of rape and dehumanization of women and girls in the hands of Nigerian soldiers in Rivers State and Bayelsa and other situations of conflict and for rehabilitation and compensation for all who suffered brutality. Everyone, young and old has a role to play in stopping gender based violence. We recommend continuous dialogue with all sectors rather than the use of force in a civilian regime.

On this occasion, GPI South East girls are going to re-enforce this message on gender-based violence with drama and songs from their experiences. Thank you all for your patience and for being here today. ♀