



REPUBLIC OF KENYA
MINISTRY OF PUBLIC SERVICE AND GENDER
OFFICE OF THE CABINET SECRETARY
PRESS STATEMENT

REPORT BY THE HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH ON GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE IN KENYA DURING COVID-19

1. On 21st September 2021, Human Rights Watch released a report titled "*I Had Nowhere to Go: Violence Against Women and Girls during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Kenya*". The Report concludes that the Government's response to Gender-Based Violence (GBV) during the Covid-19 Pandemic was too little too late.
2. While acknowledging a global increase of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) during the pandemic, we restate that the Government does not condone any form of SGBV. As the Ministry responsible for promoting gender equality and women's empowerment, we wish to categorically refute the claims made in the report that the Kenyan Government failed to ensure services to prevent Gender-Based Violence, and provide assistance to survivors under its COVID-19 response plan.
3. We are deeply concerned that no effort whatsoever was made by the HRW to share the report with relevant stakeholders, including the Government, for their right of reply; to provide input, clarity, or context yet the report is said to have been concluded in February 2021.
4. **Importantly, the Ministry of Public Service and Gender on behalf of the Government wishes to respond by highlighting the following key facts;**
 - i. In response to the pandemic, the Government resolved to mitigate and de-escalate the vice by deploying a multi-agency approach bringing together County Governments, Gender Sector Working Groups, development partners and other non-state actors.
 - ii. A robust coordination framework was established and included National and County Gender Sector Working Groups to enhance effectiveness in implementing the GBV programs.
 - iii. While the Government has no intention to undermine the findings and in particular the experiences of the 13 GBV victims, it is misleading for HRW to generalize and condemn the Government wholesale based on a non-representative interview sample of 26 persons.
 - iv. The Report fails to acknowledge the initial and critical steps taken by the Government at the inception of the pandemic which included instituting the collection of real-time disaggregated data and the commissioning of a rapid gender assessment on COVID-19 to generate real-time data. This action has informed policies and interventions during and after the pandemic and into the post-recovery period.

- v. Additionally, it does not draw any information from the comprehensive research undertaken by the Government's National Crime and Research Centre (NCRC) and the resultant Report titled: "*Trapped within a lockdown: Understanding Sexual and Gender-Based Violence during the Covid-19 Period*".
 - vi. The HRW report indicates that most survivors interviewed did not report the incidents during the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the Government was able to provide immediate assistance to survivors of GBV/FGM through online counselling and referrals for medical and legal services and safe spaces. This followed the enhancement of its support to the **toll-free Helpline 1195**. Other helplines included the **National Police helpline- 0800730999** and **Child helpline-116**.
 - vii. The Ministry through the National Government Affirmative Action Fund (NGAAF) established eight (8) GBV shelters and through the shelters network led by Civil Society Organisations, over 52 shelter/safe spaces were mapped and included in the available services to GBV victims. It also established Gender-Based Violence Recovery Centres in all Level 5 Hospitals across the country.
 - viii. The report states that there was a little financial impact for GBV survivors through the cash transfer programs. In response to the loss of jobs and livelihoods due to effects of COVID-19, Affirmative Action Funds were scaled up lending to women, youth and persons with disabilities. Funds disbursed included Women Enterprise Fund - **Kshs. 3,314,360,000-(USD30,034,980)**, UWEZO- **Kshs541,100,000 (USD4,903,489)** and NGAAF -**Kshs. 1,316,000,000 (USD 11,925,691)**.
5. It is with concern, therefore, that we note that the HRW report has created a false perception that stands a real risk of causing unnecessary anxiety to the already burdened victims of SGBV in Kenya and who may find it difficult to seek the support needed and which is available to them.
 6. The Government calls on Human Rights Watch to remain true to its value of independence. Fundamentally, the protection of the rights of women and girls is dependent on accountability of our actions, the same driven by a genuine desire to promote and protect women and girls.
 7. We wish to assure all women and girls, and our partners that we will build on our collective gains on eliminating GBV, explore innovative strategies and deliver concrete steps for women and girls, to realise the goals under the SDGs transformative Agenda.
 8. In conclusion, the fight against Sexual and Gender-Based Violence cannot be won by a single agency. Thus, the country's priority will continue to focus on the Presidential Commitment to end Female Genital Mutilation by 2022 and to meet the Generation Equality Forum Action Coalition on GBV Commitments aimed at strengthening the response and coordination of Gender-Based Violence.

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