

Call to confront injustice against women

As Uganda prepared to join the rest of the world to celebrate International Women's Day, the Human Rights Commission organised an Inter-Faith Women Dialogue on Violence Against Women and Children. The chairperson of the Uganda Human Rights Commission, Mariam Wangadya, delivered a keynote speech during the function at the Muslim Supreme Council Conference Hall in Kampala on March 4. Below is the speech

As-salamu Alaykum, shalom, greetings in the name of our shared creator.

It is a profound honour to stand before you today in this space of dialogue and unity. As we gather under the powerful theme, *Rights, Justice and Action for All Women and Girls*, we do so at a pivotal moment. As Uganda joins the world in celebrating International Women's Day, echoing the global call for equal rights, justice and decisive action, we confront a harsh reality: the world still grapples with the scourge of violence against women and girls.

Let me begin with the sobering truth that statistics reveal. In Uganda, violence remains far too common. According to key national surveys, including the Uganda Violence Against Children Survey and related reports, one in three girls experiences sexual violence during childhood, with one in 10 girls facing rape and one in five reporting their first sexual experience as forced or pressured. Physical violence affects nearly half of children at the hands of caregivers or teachers. For women, lifetime intimate partner violence hovers around 50-55%



in many studies, with recent data showing persistent high rates of physical, sexual, psychological and economic abuse.

Globally, hundreds of millions of women face similar fates, but in our country, these numbers translate to real lives shattered, daughters, sisters, mothers and future leaders robbed of safety and potential.

Yet, amid this darkness, we must acknowledge the progress made. Faith communities have been at the forefront: mosques, churches and other places of worship have opened doors for counselling, awareness campaigns and safe spaces.

Civil society organisations, supported by legal frameworks, such as the Domestic Violence Act and the Children Act, have amplified voices. We recognise that the Judiciary continues to assert gender equality through decisions that enhance protection for women in marriage. The media continues to expose otherwise

hidden abuses, while legal practitioners have pursued justice in courts.

We note that female genital mutilation has significantly reduced following its abolition in 2010, stronger reporting mechanisms and growing interfaith coalitions condemning gender-based violence as incompatible with our shared values of compassion, dignity and justice. However, progress is uneven.

Although we acknowledge how far we have come in protecting women and girls, we know that the fight is far from over. Sexual and gender-based violence continues to present urgent concerns. 12,300 cases of defilement were reported to the Police in 2024. The Police reported a 3% decrease from 2023, however, the numbers remain high. Statistics indicate that 25% of teenage girls have been pregnant by 19. The care burden lies largely on the shoulders of women as mothers, aunts and grandmothers.

This significantly affects their economic status and their access to services. We are also seeing growing online violence disproportionately impacting girls and women.

Cultural norms that normalise violence, stigma that silences survivors, limited access to justice in rural areas, economic dependence that traps women in abusive situations, and the intersection of poverty, conflict, and displacement that heightens risks – particularly in refugee settlements where rates of gender-based violence remain alarmingly high. Recent research findings underscore these gaps. Under-reporting is rampant, with many survivors fearing reprisal or disbelief.

**Read the full version
at www.newvision.co.ug**