

PRESS RELEASE

2ND June 2004

**COMMUNIQUE ISSUED AT THE END OF THE
WORKSHOP/ROUNDTABLE ORGANISED ON JUNE 1, 2004 BY
WOMEN AGAINST RAPE, SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND SEXUAL
EXPLOITATION (WARSHE) AT D' ROVANS HOTEL, IBADAN.**

1. PREAMBLE

The Organization, Women Against Rape, Sexual Harassment and Sexual Exploitation (WARSHE) organized a Workshop/Roundtable on the theme: **“THE SURVIVORS OF RAPE AND OTHER SEXUAL ASSAULTS: THE SEARCH FOR JUSTICE”** on Tuesday 1ST June, 2004 at D' Rovans Hotel, Ibadan with financial support from the African Women's Development Fund (AWDF), Accra, Ghana.

2. OBJECTIVES

During the course of pursuing its broad objectives since its formation many years ago, WARSHE has been very active in assisting victims of rape to seek and obtain justice for the injury suffered by them. Based on the experience gathered over the years and in order to assist it further in its cause, the workshop/roundtable was designed by WARSHE to achieve the following objectives:

- (i) To sensitize key persons within the institutions concerned with the administration of Justice to:
 - (a) the environments in which rape and other sexual assaults take place;
 - (b) the potential victims of rape and other sexual assaults; and
 - (c) the medical (Gynae and mental health) and sociological implications of rape and other sexual assaults.
- (ii) To share WARSHE's experience in handling cases of sexual violence and abuse in the last four years with participants and to learn from key persons in institutions concerned with the quest for justice about how to better help victims in the search for justice.
- (iii) To bring key persons in the search for justice for victims together so that they can jointly respond to the array of questions that has been agitating our minds (at WARSHE) for some time. The answers will serve as the basis for a handbook that WARSHE intends to produce and distribute widely.

- (iv) To raise the possibility that participants, at some point in the next six months, will give a seminar each to their professional colleagues/co-workers raising most of the key concerns (as it relates to their own groups) that will emerge from the workshop/roundtable.

3. PARTICIPATION

Participants were drawn from various strata of the society including medical doctors, lawyers, magistrates, prosecutors, police detectives, teachers, social workers, students, media practitioners, NGOs etc.

4 DELIBERATION & OBSERVATIONS:

Participants expressed their gut feelings about rape and sexual assaults; about the victims and the assailants. They expressed their aversion, frustration, concern and hope about these dehumanizing offences and traced the source of the problems being encountered to deficiencies in the structure of society. The sources of the problem, manifestations of the deficiencies in the structure of society and the other related problems that they identified included: patriarchy; unequal power relations; culture of silence by victims and their families; lack of education about rape and sex; declining social values; stigmatization of victims instead of the assailant; and negative attitude of doctors, investigating police officers, judges and the society to victims. Others are: absence of free medical services for victims; poverty; corruption; obsolete laws; arraignment of assailants before magistrates that lack jurisdiction to try the offence charged; absence of Investigating Police Officer (IPO) and other witnesses to give evidence when required; absence of protection for victims and witnesses during trial; withdrawal of complaint or non-cooperation by victims and or their families due to societal pressure; non-recognition of medical report from private medical practitioners; non-preservation or loss of real evidence; near impossibility of proving the ingredients of sexual offences in order to obtain and or sustain conviction of assailants; defective judicial system; incessant adjournments leading to delay of justice; failure of punishment; and absence of compensation for victims; etc

Participants also took a comprehensive look at the medical repercussions of rape and sexual assaults such as: sexually transmitted diseases; Vesico-Vaginal Fistula (VVF); hemorrhage; lacerations; HIV/AIDS;

unwanted pregnancy (at times leading to unsafe abortion); depression; suicide attempts and at times, death.

5 APPEALS:

Considering the repercussions of rape and other sexual assaults, and the problems already highlighted in the search for justice for survivors of sexual offences, workshop

- a. Calls on the police to: accord victims prompt assistance and privacy whenever they visit police stations to report sexual offences; not to judge or condemn victims; and to treat sexual offences as special offences that must not be settled at police stations but punished according to law.
- b. Calls on the police and other civil society organizations to conduct regular training for police investigators and prosecutors so as to enhance their ability to successfully investigate and prosecute sexual offences in courts.
- c. Calls on the government to make adequate provisions for the welfare of witnesses especially IPOs transferred away from the court's jurisdiction.
- d. Calls on the media to give more prominence to reports on sexual offences.
- e. Calls on medical workers to be prompt, thorough, compassionate and non-judgmental in the course of examining victims and to give detailed medical reports in simple language.
- f. Calls for the immediate release of the Oputa panel report and implementation of its recommendations.
- g. Calls on religious organizations and leaders to educate their members on matters bothering on sexual offences and their implications to spiritualism and the society.
- h. Calls on parents to give their male children information on consensual and healthy sexual relationships.

6) CONCLUSIONS:

- i. That WARSHE should team up with other organizations to campaign for the reform of all laws on sexual offences like rape and sexual assault so as to reduce technicalities, bring justice to victims without delay and compensate them.
- j. That there is need to embark on aggressive education of potential victims so as to aid police investigation, which will assist the prosecution of cases and reduce the rampancy of sexual offences.

- k. That there is urgent need to correct the unequal relations of power in our society, and ensure the orientation of males as to the reproductive right of women and protect this right statutorily.
- l. That in cases of forgiveness by victims or their family on religious or other grounds, the assailant should still be punished according to law in order to deter others.
- m. That all stakeholders in matters of sexual offences (the victims, their families, witnesses, police, lawyers, sympathetic magistrates/judges, NGOs, etc) should combine efforts and frontally contain all hurdles in the path of justice for survivors of sexual offences.
- n. That WARSHE should explore the possibility of collaborating with other relevant NGOs to embark on a Legal Aid Project for victims of sexual offences.

Signed
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Signed
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