

Table of Contents

- [*Zimbabwe women urged to report rape by soldiers*](#)
- [*'My dreams were destroyed': poverty costs child brides dear in Zimbabwe*](#)
- [*Prominent Zimbabwean men volunteer to champion gender equality, fight violence*](#)

Zimbabwe women urged to report rape by soldiers

BBC (29.01.2019) - <https://bbc.in/2Ba5n9s> - Women allegedly raped by the security forces during night raids to suppress recent protests have been urged to report their cases to the police.

The information minister said only one attack has been officially reported despite numerous allegations, the state-run Herald newspaper reports.

The BBC has spoken to six women who said they were raped by soldiers.

Correspondents say there is widespread mistrust of the police, who were also involved in the crackdown on protests.

The state-funded Zimbabwe Human Rights Commission has accused soldiers of using "systematic torture" in the crackdown on protests that broke out a fortnight ago following a more than doubling in fuel prices. It has strongly criticised the authorities for using troops to quell demonstrations.

The BBC spoke to six women who had sought refuge at a safe house about their experiences during the night-time door-to-door raids by the security forces.

One of the women said: "They slapped me, then said they want to have sex with me.

When I refused, they slapped me again. The first soldier had unprotected sex with me. Then the other one said, 'I want to do the same.'"

Information Minister Monica Mutsvangwa said the government did not condone and or tolerate "criminal behaviour by any member of society particularly those in positions of trust".

"All women, who were allegedly raped, are encouraged to come forward and report the cases to the Zimbabwe Republic Police Victim Friendly Unit, which can be found at every police station around the country," The Herald quotes her as saying in a statement.

"The unit is led by a female commissioner, hence, all affected women will be treated with empathy, compassion, respect and due care. Their safety will be guaranteed," she added.

Angry lawyers

Police say more than 1,000 people, including some children, have been arrested in the crackdown.

The BBC's Shingai Nyoka in Harare says hundreds of lawyers protested on Tuesday in the capital, Harare, against the mass arrests and torture of alleged protesters in detention.

They accused some judges and magistrates of being complicit in human rights violations by fast-tracking of the trials of protesters and denying them bail.

Later in the day, the High Court ordered the release of pastor Evan Mawarire, a prominent activist who has been charged with subversion for calling a three-day stayaway in protest at the rise in fuel prices.

Meanwhile, police say they have arrested an officer seen assaulting a protester in a TV report.

President Emmerson Mnangagwa had ordered the arrest of three men caught on camera assaulting a handcuffed civilian on Saturday.

The officer arrested on Tuesday, Constable Mukamire, had been off duty as he had been suspended in September 2018, the police statement said.

"The security services have always been emphasising that bogus and rogue elements are responsible for acts of lawlessness, which are tarnishing good standing of the security forces," police spokesperson Charity Charamba said.

She urged members of the public who had "suffered similar ordeals" to come forward and report such incidents to the police.

'My dreams were destroyed': poverty costs child brides dear in Zimbabwe

Married off at 13, Maureen lost her education and her health. Her plight is common in a country racked by economic turmoil

By Nyasha Chingono

The Guardian (04.01.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2Sxp1m5> - The end of Maureen's days at a primary school in north-eastern Zimbabwe marked the beginning of her life as a wife.

At 13, the brightest student in her class in Mudzi, Mashonaland, she was married to a man three times her age.

Her father, a poor farmer, had promised to fund Maureen's secondary education but, when the time came, he could not raise the money. Marrying off his daughter was a quick fix. Maureen swiftly fell pregnant and was still 13 when she gave birth after spending hours in labour. The baby did not survive.

Three years on and Maureen is at Chinhoyi provincial hospital. She is among the scores of underage brides being cared for here who are suffering from obstetric fistula, caused by prolonged labour.

"I haven't forgiven my parents for doing this to me. I had a bright future but now they treat me like an outcast," says Maureen.

When my parents told me about the marriage I couldn't believe it, because they had always given me the impression that I was their most intelligent child and I would pursue my studies. The man was abusive, he called me names and beat me several times, especially after I lost my baby," she says. "My dreams were destroyed by that man."

Child marriage in Zimbabwe is often driven by poverty. Dowries offer a welcome, if brief, respite from penury in poor households struggling to weather a vicious economic crisis. The brides, though, are more likely to remain in a state of privation due to lack of personal development and education.

Although underage marriage is illegal and local organisations have been fighting against it as an economic transaction, the financial meltdown has worsened the situation. About one in every three girls in Zimbabwe is married before the age of 18, the legal age of consent.

According to campaign organisation Girls Not Brides, families see little worth in girls.

"In many communities, economic opportunities are severely limited, especially for girls and women. Families therefore see little value in educating their daughters and instead marry them off to fulfil the role of a wife and mother," says a Girls Not Brides spokesperson.

Zimbabwe is facing an acute shortage of cash and, as basic commodities disappear from the shelves, families' disposable income has been depleted.

Rights defenders say child marriage, outlawed by the Zimbabwean constitutional court in 2016, has spiralled in the rural areas that constitute 75% of the country.

Kresi, 16, from Masvingo, is another teenager whose future was jeopardised when she was married off to a cattle farmer in her village. Her family received a dowry of two cows and a few groceries in exchange for Kresi. She also suffers from obstetric fistula, a hole between the genital tract and bladder or rectum caused by lengthy or obstructed labour.

Women and girls who experience obstetric fistula suffer constant incontinence, shame, social segregation and further health problems. It is estimated that more than 2 million young women in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa live with the condition untreated.

"I felt cheap and abused. My mates are in high school doing well for themselves. [My family] had no business selling me off. Now I have this condition which I cannot control. No one has even come to see me in this hospital," Kresi says, sobbing.

Tendai, 14, of Bindura says her family gave her away in exchange for 100 Zimbabwean dollars (22p).

She was married to a man with three wives. As the youngest wife, Tendai is burdened with both child-bearing and work in the fields.

"I still want to go back to school. I just hope my husband can give me that chance. But as the youngest wife I have to do everything here at home," Tendai says.

She is bitter over her parent's decision to marry her off.

With a drought looming and disposable incomes depleted from galloping inflation, poor families are more likely to exchange their daughter for very little.

"In areas like Binga, Matabeleland, the dowry can be a goat, which is an insult to the value of the girl. In some instances families just leave their child at the man's house to lessen their own burden," says Grace Maunganidze, a local activist.

Another activist, Abigail Mutema, blames child marriages on the stronghold of a patriarchal society.

"Until women are emancipated, child marriages will never end. In some of the communities, girls as young as 16 are deemed too old, so they need to get married. There is nothing to do in the rural areas, so the easier route is to get married. Poverty plays a role in these child marriages," says Mutema.

"Older women have become perpetrators of these early child marriages. A woman is not complete without marriage, they say."

Prominent Zimbabwean men volunteer to champion gender equality, fight violence

United Nations Zimbabwe (26.11.2018) - <https://bit.ly/2Rk3ugn> - The Embassy of Sweden and United Nations in Zimbabwe jointly launched a campaign called "Because I am A Man" today featuring 16 influential Zimbabwean men to lead the way in the fight to end violence against women, girls and boys.

Addressing the media and over 70 participants at the launch held on the Embassy of Sweden's office grounds, Her Excellency Sofia Calltorp, Ambassador of Sweden said, "In order to eradicate gender-based violence, we all need to come together, both women and men. But especially men. In their roles as fathers, brothers, husbands and as fellow human beings, men of all ages are key to bringing this violence to an end."

It is hoped that by involving men in the conversation about the negative consequences of harmful behaviours including violence against women, girls and boys, the campaign will influence the Zimbabwean society at-large to view gender equality as a norm to aspire for.

Co-launching the campaign the UN Resident Coordinator, Mr. Bishow Parajuli said, "Violence against women, girls and boys is a grave violation of human rights and an affront to the inherent equality and dignity of women. It is high time men hold each other accountable for their actions towards women, girls and boys and prevent the continued normalization of gender-based violence. It is also important for influential men in society to stand in solidarity with women, girls and boys and show their support for them."

The "Because I am a Man" campaign was launched at the Embassy of Sweden with the official reveal of 16 art works featuring the men taking a strong stance against gender-based violence. The showcased men were present at the event and were able to speak about the messages that they represent in the campaign.

It is often the case that women and girls are met with doubt when they speak about the abuse they have faced and even stigmatized by their communities as a result. Under the banner "Because I am a Man" the 16 men are taking a strong stand against all types of gender-based violence, including, but not limited to, physical and verbal harassment, physical and sexual abuse of women and children as well as forced child marriages and other harmful practices.

It is estimated in Zimbabwe that about 1 in 3 women aged 15 to 49 have experienced physical violence and about 1 in 4 women have experienced sexual violence since the age of 15. As with any violation of human rights, one is one too many.

The 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence is an opportunity to mobilize activists, organizations and communities worldwide to take action to end this type of violence. The 16 men representing each day of the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-based Violence with their key messages and commitment will go a long way in galvanizing communities in Zimbabwe to end violence against women, girls and boys.

16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence was first launched in 1991 by Center for Women's Global Leadership, making it the longest-running campaign for women's rights globally.

Each year, it starts on 25 November (International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) and continues through to 10 December (Human Rights Day) with the aim of galvanizing global action to end the violence against women and girls in every corner of the world.
