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Lifetime ban for football chief

Players demand end to sexual abuse in sport.

HRW (24.11.2020) - <https://bit.ly/37kfGqH> - Football's lifetime ban for Haitian soccer federation president Yves Jean-Bart is an important step forward to protect children and young women athletes in sport from sexual abuse, Human Rights Watch said today. The International Federation of Association Football (Fédération Internationale de Football Association, FIFA) decision should be followed by swift action to sanction other abusers and their accomplices, criminal prosecutions in Haiti and other jurisdictions, and ongoing therapeutic support for survivors.

After reports by The Guardian and Human Rights Watch and pressure from Haitian rights groups Kay Fanm, Solidarite Fanm Ayisyèn (SOFA), the National Network for the Defense of Human Rights (RNDDH), and others, over the past seven months, FIFA investigated serious allegations of sexual harassment and abuse against Jean Bart, also known as "Dadou." FIFA's Ethics Committee handed him the maximum punishment in football on Friday, November 20, 2020.

"FIFA's decision is a vindication for all the courageous survivors of abuse and witnesses who came forward to report sexual abuse," said Minky Worden, director of global initiatives at Human Rights Watch. "As Human Rights Watch has documented, they faced personal threats and stigma in society. FIFA's punishment is an important signal that if you are an abuser in football, your days are numbered."

Jean-Bart had been president of the Haitian Football Federation (Fédération Haïtienne De Football, FHF) since 2000. Following their investigation into evidence of systematic sexual abuse of female players, FIFA's Ethics Committee found Jean-Bart guilty of "having abused his position and sexually harassed and abused various female players, including minors." He is now banned from the sport for life in Haiti and internationally, and fined 1 million Swiss francs (approximately US\$1.1 million). He can appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport, and has said he will.

Survivors of sexual abuse in Haiti told Human Rights Watch that they want justice for abuses by the president but also football sanctions for all officials who aided and knew about abuses in the national football academy.

"Playing for Haiti, I gave my heart," one women's national team player told Human Rights Watch. "Without us players, you don't have a game. I am so happy Dadou can't abuse his power and stop us from achieving our dreams anymore."

Since May, Human Rights Watch has worked together with the international football players' union FIFPro, who provided lawyers and support for athletes, helped to interview witnesses, and collected evidence of systemic human rights abuses in Haitian football,

including confiscation of players' passports, labor rights abuses, grooming child athletes for sexual exploitation, and threats to kill witnesses and survivors.

Jean-Bart has been Haiti's football federation president since 2000 and was re-elected to a sixth term in February. Jean-Bart has publicly denied all allegations and successfully sought to have a judge in Haiti purportedly "clear" him of all charges and exonerate him. That a judge made this pronouncement the day before Jean-Bart's lifetime ban is testament to the power he wields in Haiti and the challenge survivors face in taking on Jean-Bart and his allies. In August, Human Rights Watch documented threats and attacks on witnesses and whistleblowers, which could prevent them from coming forward with evidence of abuses.

FIFA's statement signals other sanctions against abusers and officials who knew about or facilitated abuses in the Haiti federation could come soon:

The aforementioned ethics proceedings are part of an extensive investigation concerning Mr Jean-Bart, as well as other officials within the FHF, who were identified as having allegedly been involved (as principals, accomplices or instigators) in acts of systematic sexual abuse against female football players between 2014 and 2020. The proceedings are still pending with respect to other FHF officials.

It is essential for FIFA to discipline others who took part in sexual abuse and to remove them from football, Human Rights Watch said. FIFA needs to ensure ongoing therapeutic and logistical support for players, and enforcement of any bans and fines.

"In addition to protecting survivors and witnesses, FIFA should exercise its authority to ban and sanction all officials implicated in sexual abuse or threatening or menacing witnesses during its investigation," Worden said. "In its best form, football is fun, empowering, and healthy for young people and FIFA should do its part to ensure player safety."

Haitian women's rights groups demand justice for raped female prisoners

By Sandra Lemaire, Exalus Mergenat & Matiado Vilme

VOA (17.11.2019) - <https://bit.ly/2XQnIIX> - "Enough, we cannot deal with this anymore," a visibly disgusted Predica Jean, coordinator for the League of Haitian Women for Reconstruction (Lig Fanm Ayisyen pou Rekonstruksyon / LIFAR) said during a press conference in Port-au-Prince.

"We're asking all the political actors who are involved to resolve the situation quickly so we can have a country where we can live (in peace and security), where women's rights are respected," she added.

Jean decried the gang rape of a dozen female prisoners by male prisoners attempting to escape from a jail in the northern city of Gonaives last week. She asked for justice and reparations for all the women who were violated.

About 340 male prisoners, angry about the jail's poor living conditions, broke out Nov. 7-8. They had been reportedly held for days in overcrowded cells without food and water. They managed to disarm a guard and break through the gates. Once out, they sought

female prisoners in a separate part of the jail, according to witnesses, and raped them repeatedly until a police unit arrived and fired tear gas to stop the attack.

Jean also demanded the immediate release of a female prisoner who remained jailed even though she was set to be released before the attacks.

"They claimed they couldn't find her release form and held her in jail where she was subjected to rape," Jean told reporters.

The LIFAR coordinator cited the Geneva Conventions and other international law statutes that demand prisoners of war, as well as civilian prisoners, be treated humanely. "These laws are being violated in our country," Jean said.

A human rights activist who spoke to VOA Creole said police officers who arrived at the jail during the incident told him they were shaken by what they heard.

"Some of the officers said they were heartbroken and crying when they heard the screams of the women during the criminal actions of the men," the activist said.

After the incident, the nongovernmental organization Zanmi Lasante (Friends for Health) stepped in to address the rape victims' immediate health needs, including testing for sexually transmitted diseases. They were also provided medication to prevent unwanted pregnancies.

Jeanne Bolivar, the Haitian Ministry for Women's Affairs coordinator for the Artibonite Department, visited the female prisoners and told VOA Creole they were visibly distraught. She said she is working to find a psychologist who can counsel the victims. She also denounced the authorities of Gonaives who transferred the women after the attack to a jail in neighboring St. Marc in their underwear.

"The women's rights were not respected, their dignity was not respected at all," Bolivar said. She told VOA Creole she spoke to a young woman who told her she was raped by seven men.

Bolivar said she is working to find food for the transferred prisoners as well.

Women's rights activist Guerline Residor called on law enforcement officials to act responsibly.

"We are asking the Ministry of Justice, the chief of police, police officers, etc., to intervene rapidly to resolve the dangerous situation women in the north find themselves in," she said.