

## JOINT PRESS STATEMENT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

The media spotlight is once again focusing on the alarming rates of violence against women and girl children. The bodies of our daughters, mothers, wives, sisters, aunts, nieces and grandmothers have increasingly become the target of assault, rape, defilement, harassment, struggle and contestation. The stories of abuse are harrowingly similar, the patterns are clear and consistent. They cut across tribe, religion, income, class and culture—violence does not discriminate.

Over the years, the women's movement in Uganda has vigorously combated this heinous crime and we continue to tackle violence against women through an ongoing campaign to demand an end to the violence and claim our rights to a healthy life. We demand dignity, self-worth, respect and protection from cruel and degrading treatment. At the same time, we know that the epidemic of gender-based violence is directly linked to women's marginalization and subordination in society. Thousands of women who have survived violence are coming out and saying, "Enough is Enough!" "Enough is Enough!" We owe it to the fallen sisters to continue with this struggle and prove that they did not die in vain.

A close analysis of recent media reports reveals that violence against women occurs both within the privacy of our homes and in the public arena. When it happens in the domestic context the tendency is to treat it as a "private affair," leaving the victims with no redress and encouraging the perpetrators to act with impunity. Even when the violence is committed within the communities or by state actors and combatants in conflict situations, the burden falls on the victim to prove the crime, "beyond any reasonable doubt". Such burden of proof is extremely difficult for women to discharge in say, rape cases.

We demand that government prioritizes the elimination of violence against women in our society. Ugandans must work together in the areas of law reform, raising awareness, empowerment and dismantling the structural and institutional factors that facilitate violence against women. Study after study has shown the far-reaching costs and dire consequences of violence against women on national development policies and on other strategies such as those on HIV/AIDS, agriculture, industrialization, etc. In other words, violence against women is an indictment of us all, men and women.

The Constitution of the Republic of Uganda obliges government to "recognize the significant role that women play in society." The larger half of our population (women) cannot execute their role under conditions of violence or the threat of violence. It is therefore incumbent upon the Executive, Parliament, the Judiciary, local councils, religious leaders, and the general public to take this beast by its horns. It is only when women realize their full potential and substantive rights that this nation will mark its final bastion of democracy and development.

As part of our campaign we invite the public to join us in a peaceful march against gender-based violence scheduled to take place on June 10, 2008 starting at ---[place]--- at ---[time].

Signed by—

[List of organizations that wish to append their endorsement]