

Part 3

Violence against Women and Children



Woman and child amputee

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Violence against women and children is a universal problem which violates their fundamental human rights in peacetime as well as in conflict situations; violence usually has a tremendous impact on the basic wellbeing of a community.

Violence can be grouped under three broad headings: physical violence, sexual violence and psychological violence.

Physical violence includes:

- ◆ sexual;
- ◆ domestic;
- ◆ peer/social group;
- ◆ abuse and exploitation.

Sexual violence includes:

- ◆ rape;
- ◆ abuse by spouses/parents;
- ◆ harassment/molestation;
- ◆ forced prostitution;
- ◆ trafficking.

Psychological violence, which emanates from physical and sexual violence, includes:

- ◆ threats;
- ◆ deprivation;
- ◆ condoning of violence by the established authority and security.

It is well known that violence against women and children is under-reported and under-recorded for various reasons, chief among which is the stigma associated with survivors; in most cases the offender is known to the family.

This paper is focused on the interventions made by the Forum of African Women Educationalists (FAWE) after the 6 January 1999 invasion of Freetown and the horrific experiences of some of the survivors of sexual and gender-based violence; it will also highlight lessons learned from the interventions and make suggestions for the prevention of violence.

FAWE's mandate is to support women and girls to acquire education for development. The senseless 10-year war in this country has deprived a large percentage of women and children the opportunity to acquire education; this was what triggered off FAWE's intervention.

It should be noted that universally women and children are rarely in the planning stages of wars and conflicts but they end up bearing the brunt of it all.

There is no single agreed definition of violence against women but Articles 1 and 2 of the UN Declaration for the Elimination of Violence against Women define the term 'violence against women' as any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty whether occurring in private or public life. The term is also used to include the abuse of girls.

There are various forms of sexual violence but rape is the most commonly referred to.

Rape is generally defined as sexual intercourse with another person without their consent. It is committed in circumstances when the survivor's resistance is overcome by force or fear or under other coercive conditions.

Sexual violence can also involve the use of or threat of force in order to have sexual acts performed by a third person or persons.

Those who perpetrate sexual violence usually do so from a strong desire for power and domination.

An act of forced sexual behaviour can be life-threatening and, like other forms of torture, it is often meant to hurt, control and humiliate, thereby violating a person's innermost physical and mental integrity.

It is unlawful for sexual intercourse to occur with someone under a specified age.

Sexual violence is universal, and women and young girls are vulnerable to such attacks. To a lesser extent men and boys are also open to such attacks, particularly during armed conflicts and in situations of displacement.

According to *UNHCR Conditions for Prevention and Response*, the term sexual violence is used to cover 'all forms of sexual threat, assault, domestic violence, interference and exploitation, including involuntary prostitution, statutory rape and molestation without physical harm or penetration'.

In short, sexual violence is a gross violation of fundamental human rights and, when committed within the context of armed conflict, it is a grave breach of 'humanitarian law'.

At a recent conference organised by UNHCR on 'Prevention and Response to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in Refugee Situations', in which FAWE participated, the expected outcomes included:

- ◆ Increased awareness of the issue;
- ◆ Operational guidelines on how to intervene effectively;
- ◆ Analysis of sexual/gender-based violence programmes: what has been accomplished and the impact;
- ◆ Political commitment/support to enhance programming.

FAWE hopes that these points will be taken into account during this consultation.

In cases of domestic sexual abuse of children, the physical and psychological wellbeing of the children is of paramount importance.

Violence against children reflects significant structural components of our society: it results from feelings of disempowerment and the inappropriate emphasis on responsibility rather than the rights of children.

Articles 34 and 39 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child are explicit on violence against children. Article 34 states that 'children shall be protected from violence, exploitation and sexual abuse'. Article 39 states that 'a child who has been subjected to negligence, abuse, neglect, torture, armed conflicts or other inhuman treatment has the right to rehabilitation and readjustment'.

The Geneva Convention Relative to the Protection of Civil Persons in Times of War (the Fourth Geneva Convention, 1949) Article 27 states that 'Women shall be especially protected against any attack on their honour, in particular against rape, enforced prostitution or any form of indecent assault.' Protocol 1 relating to the Protection of Victims of International Armed Conflict (1977) Article 77 states that 'Children must be the object of special respect and must be protected against any form of indecent assault.'

International Criminal Tribunals in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia confirm that sexual and gender-based violence is an offence.

The African Charter on Human and People's Rights 1981 Article 18 states that the state shall ensure the elimination of every discrimination against women and shall also ensure the protection of the rights of the woman and child as stipulated in international declarations and conventions.

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) affirms that 'discrimination against women means any distinction, exclusion or restriction made on the basis of sex which has the effect or purpose of impairing or nullifying the enjoyment or exercise by women of human rights and fundamental freedoms.' Gender-based violence is a form of discrimination against women.

These examples of international instruments and declarations are not exhaustive but it is pertinent to note that states, Sierra Leone not exempted, have agreed to abide by them, and yet the worst atrocities have been inflicted on our women and children in the last ten years.

A total of 2,350 survivors were registered in Freetown between March 1999 and March 2000 during FAWE's initial Rape Victims Programme. Collaborating agencies were Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW), the Ministry of Social Welfare, Gender and Children's Affairs (MSWGCA) and Médecins San Frontières (MSF), The Netherlands. Later UNICEF and UNHCR also became partners.

The first step of the intervention was public sensitisation on radio and television and talks to schoolchildren, followed by counselling sessions and referrals to the team doctors. Those survivors who were pregnant benefited from antenatal and postnatal care. There were male doctors and counsellors.

There were some male survivors and equally of interest is that the violence they suffered was no less a crime. FAWE Branch Kenema ran a similar programme.

The Medical Report on Abductees following the 6 January 1999 invasion of Freetown showed that, although the medical team treated over 2,000 patients, only 1,168 patients with a complete record of their history and treatment were included in the report. Of the patients, 99 per cent had been abducted from Freetown and the rest had been abducted from Makeni and Kono.

The survivors had suffered from physical, psychological and sexual violence, viz:

- ◆ Physical: 274 (23.4 per cent) had been beaten. The degree of violence ranged from a few slaps to severe and brutal beating.
- ◆ Psychological: 114 (9.7 per cent).
- ◆ Sexual: 648 (55.4 per cent) had been raped: some of them had been raped by one, two, three or even ten or more men. Two survivors in particular were raped by 15 and 30 men respectively. The former had given birth to a baby only two weeks before being raped. Both patients suffered from prolapse of the uterus (the womb descending via the vagina). The former woman had a repair to return the uterus to its proper position. The latter woman had a major degree of prolapse and the uterus had to be removed, i.e., total hysterectomy.

Of the 1,168 treated, 901 were females (77 per cent); 139 were males (11.9 per cent). For the remaining 128 (10.9 per cent), the gender was not specified.

Some children actually witnessed their mothers being raped and/or their parents being gunned down.

The attempted rebel invasion of Guinea has swelled the number of sexual violence survivors. For these survivors it has been a double tragedy: having fled the war in Sierra Leone only to have to go through further traumatic experiences. FAWE has intervened with support from UNHCR and other partners to provide information, counselling and medical services, and skills training for an initial period of three months. The skills will include non-traditional skills for females, such as the building trade (carpentry and masonry) to equip survivors to take part in the reconstruction process.

Mark Anthony in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* had this to say to the crowd at Caesar's funeral: 'If you have tears prepare to shed them now.' FAWE is saying, this is not the time for tears. Listen to some of the survivors' stories, and if you have consciences prepare yourselves and begin to take action now, because violence against women and children is an immediate crisis that needs immediate attention. Failure to respond adequately may result in consequences that are unspeakable and unacceptable.

Survivors' Stories

Survivor A (25 years old)

She was abducted on 7 January from central Freetown, witnessed the brutal killing of her husband by the rebels and was raped in the presence of three children before being abducted and taken to the jungle, where between 15 and 20 men raped her while she was tied hands and feet apart to a tree. She was released after months. She came to seek medical help at FAWE with a complete prolapse of the uterus.

On January 7 1999 very early in the morning, we were still in bed when I heard gunshots in our compound. I quickly got up, woke my husband, called our three kids, one girl 8 years, and two boys, 11 and 6 years respectively, to our room where the kids and myself took cover in the wardrobe. My husband was so confused he didn't know what to do. Suddenly the rebels banged our door and forced it open. As soon as they entered our room, they demanded money from my husband. He gave them fifty thousand leones (Le50,000), which was all the money we had. They asked for more, but my husband told them he had no money. One of the rebels cocked his gun and threatened to blow his head off if he refused to give them more money. 'You people thought we had gone, but we are here today to kill all of you bloody civilians who refused to support us', the rebel said. 'If you have no money then let me send you to eternal rest', the rebel with the gun cocked said. Then he shot my husband on the chest. My husband fell shouting, 'You have killed me.' I couldn't bear it, so I opened the door of the wardrobe, shouting 'You killed my husband.' So they caught hold of me and told me not worry—that they would take care of me.

Immediately in the presence of my kids all six soldiers raped me one after the other. After this first rape, they asked everybody else in the house to come out. By then everybody had left the compound except my own family members. My kids came out crying. One of the rebels ordered me to march forward, pointing his gun at me. While we were a little bit away from the house, I saw smoke coming from its direction. The rebel who held me under gun point started laughing at me and then told me that it is our house that is now on fire, so why can't I follow them, since I had no more husband and no more house. I cried throughout, but they refused to release me. Eventually they took me to the jungle as they retreated from the ECOMOG advance. My two months in the jungle was a horrible experience. The six men who raided our house kept torturing me. They tied my legs and hands apart on a tree, kicking me in the stomach accusing me of overlooking [overlooking in the jungle means disrespect]. They raped me again one after the other and invited other combatants to join them. Whenever I cried and begged them, they insulted me and intensified their assault. I counted between 15 and 20 men who raped me that night. I was so helpless. I kept bleeding and eventually I felt something come out between my legs. I later learnt that it was my womb. I was left alone to die for more than a month. With the help of other women, native herbs were prepared to ease my pain. Then my condition worsened, and my abductors eventually released me in March 1999.

My relatives then immediately took me to FAWE. Thanks to FAWE I am alive today to narrate my horrible experience.



Rebuilding broken lives: girls at the FAWE centre, Freetown

Survivor B (19 years old), who spent four years with the RUF

She was among the schoolchildren abducted by the rebels in the secondary and primary school in Kambai District in 1995. She escaped during the January 6 1999 invasion on Freetown when she was eight months' pregnant.

I was among the schoolchildren captured by the RUF in 1995. When we were captured, we were all taken to a very remote RUF base at Malal Hills. By then I was 14 years old and a virgin. I was gang raped the very night I was captured as an initiation to the RUF community. We spent three months in military training in the hills there.

When the government jet bombarded our base we pulled out to another location for one month. Then we were eventually sent to Kailahun. We were drugged whenever we were to go on mission. On coming back to the base, there were three particular rebels who would ask me for sex. If I dared to refuse, I would be forced at gunpoint or gang raped.

When the soldiers took over in 1997 and invited the RUF to join them, we were all brought to Freetown and kept in a camp at Benguema. During those days we were under

tight security and surveillance: they did not want us to escape and join our relatives. They were so cruel to us then, I mean, to most of the girls: I was gang raped on so many occasions. When the rebel who used to defend me was away guarding a checkpoint, they killed most of my friends who refused their advances. I remember being tortured once for refusing the advances of one self-styled commando. I was made to lie on my back facing the sun with my legs apart. Whenever I attempted to shift my leg, I was whipped. I tried on so many occasions to escape but was not successful.

When ECOMOG intervened in 1998, we were all loaded in a truck and taken back to the jungle in Lunsar. I seized the opportunity to escape when we attacked Freetown in January 1999. By then I was eight months' pregnant: barely two months after my escape I delivered twins—two boys.

Survivor C (13-year-old girl)

When the rebels raided Allen Town in the East End of Freetown on January 6 1999 morning, everybody in our house ran for his or her life.

Instead of running towards Freetown, I headed towards Waterloo. I remained in the bush together with other girls from our area for nearly two weeks. When the rebels were retreating from the city, we were unfortunate that we were all discovered in our hiding place by the Sierra Leone Army (SLA) renegade soldiers.

One of my friends, about 15 years old, was the first to be raped by five of them, one after the other under gun point. Then it was another's turn, then mine. I shouted that I had never known a man. One of them immediately dragged me and dropped me on the ground and scattered my legs: 'If you have never known a man, then you'll know a knife today.' He drew a knife from his side still holding my legs apart with the help of another rebel. Then he stabbed me in my privates three times with the knife. I immediately became unconscious. I woke up later to discover myself in the same location. I don't know whether they gave me up as dead, but they had abandoned me. I did not even know which day it was I managed to find my way back to Allen Town. I was lucky that no member of my family was killed nor our house burnt. My parents immediately took me to a doctor for medical treatment, where the doctor told me that my urinary gland had been destroyed. To this day a tube is connected inside me to channel my urine to a bag attached under my dress. I feel so uncomfortable carrying the tube and bag.

Survivor D (17 years old)

She lost her parents on the night of January 6 1999 when they were used as human shields. Two brothers raped her, and she was also conscripted in the fighting force. She escaped in December 1999.

When they entered the city that night of 6 January 1999, they entered our house and ordered all of us to stay put—we were all used as human shields as they were advancing towards the centre of the city. My parents were both killed that night in crossfire. On 7 January 1999 I was abducted together with other girls. I was locked in an unfinished house where I was regularly raped by two young boys whom I came to learn later on were brothers. When they decided to pull out we were taken first to Waterloo then later to Masiaka where we were based for some time.

During that period most of us who were abducted were conscripted into the fighting force. Every day we used to go on looting missions. They would drug us first thing in the morning before taking us out. I was given a machete to cut off people's hands and a pistol to fire at any enemy. Most of the children abducted died during those raids; we were given ammunition to carry during those raids.

When the government forces raided our base we pulled out to another base in Mile 91. One of the men who used to force me to have sex with them died during that raid. Another rebel took charge of me, a RUF commando. He used to lock me in a cage naked for the whole day. Anytime I refused to honour his request to have sex he would leave me in the cage after beating me. Then whenever he felt like it he took me out of the cage and raped me. He kept threatening me in this manner until one day when I managed to escape together with a few other girls. By then I was five months' pregnant. *[She escaped in December 1999.]*

Survivor E (16 years old) was captured in 1994 by the RUF in Kono at the age of ten *She was forced to carry a heavy load on her head from Koidu to Kabala. She was assaulted by two particular rebels consistently. She was conscripted into the fighting force at the age of ten, and she still suffers from the effects of drugs.*

In December 1994, when the RUF attacked Koidu, it was still dark in the morning. They raided our compound and put everybody in the house at gunpoint. I was taken away together with my two brothers who were the same age. Mohamed, Alusine and myself were forced to carry ammunition and looted property on our heads to Kabala. It was so heavy, whenever we slowed our pace we were beaten with gun butts. On reaching Kabala one rebel deflowered me that very night—he was rough. He hurt me, and when I tried to fight he slapped me on my face and tied my mouth, so that I couldn't shout. There were two of them who persistently assaulted me. At Kabala myself and my brothers were drugged every morning. We used to take it as our breakfast. We were also trained to use guns: we used to go on raids twice every month.

These are just a few horrific and dehumanising experiences our women and children have been subjected to in the last ten years.

Far too many women and children have already died and many more will continue to suffer and die if we fail to recognise the urgency of violence prevention against women and children. It is very easy to become overwhelmed with helplessness and hopelessness about the violence we have experienced in this our beautiful and once peaceful country.

Ending violence against women and children won't occur overnight because men's violence against women is based on the inequalities between men and women and the way boys learn to be men. Boys must learn that they do not need to control women and children to become men.

The police and courts must work tirelessly to enforce such laws to fight violence against women and children.

Lessons Learned

- ◆ Sensitisation and counselling sessions as well as medical treatment for the survivors were just a tip of the iceberg. Other needs included shelter, food, clothing, educational support and seed money to restart their battered lives.
- ◆ The under-eighteens who were pregnant were worried about their babies as well as continuation of their education, which had been abruptly disrupted.
- ◆ Some survivors went back to school willingly without fear of stigmatisation.
- ◆ Some survivors became strong advocates for the programme.
- ◆ Education is a useful tool to deal with sexual and gender-based violence because it became evident that families as well as survivors needed education about parenting skills, which should include culturally appropriate programmes, life-skills training and health education.
- ◆ Funding is necessary for the continuation and sustenance of the programme as well as replication in other parts of the country.
- ◆ Partnership with other agencies is essential for the success of the programme.

Suggestions for the Prevention of Sexual Violence against Women and Children

- ◆ Active participation in public information and education on violence prevention from the cradle to the grave. Let us catch them young.
- ◆ Intensification of peace education in school curriculum—with emphasis on conflict resolution through peaceful or non-violent means.

- ◆ The media, in particular. Television programmes should desist from implying that there can be violence without pain. Sometimes violence is portrayed as funny, and this encourages children to become aggressive and others to learn to become passive survivors of violence.
- ◆ Violence is a major health problem that can be prevented. National campaigns similar to 'Roll Back Malaria', 'Kick Polio Out of Africa', and HIV/AIDS awareness campaigns, should be vigorously launched. Schools of nursing and the College of Medicine and Allied Health Sciences must include violence prevention in their curricula.
- ◆ Provision of follow-up support for the changes children and their parents make to help prevent violence must be monitored and evaluated by the community.
- ◆ Male involvement in the prevention of violence against women and children should be encouraged: as men are *part* of the problem, they should be made *more* of the solution.
- ◆ Research into sexual and gender-based violence must be coordinated and sustained so that organisations do not appear to be reinventing the wheel.
- ◆ Women and children must be actively involved in the peace-building process.
- ◆ Survivors must be part of future sexual and gender-based violence prevention programmes.
- ◆ Survivors should be trained in a variety of skills to enable them to live above subsistence level as well as in skills which are relevant to the economy of the area where they reside. All skills training programmes for survivors should include basic literacy and numeracy, as well as peace education. Leadership skills to empower survivors to participate fully in society should be included.
- ◆ Monitoring and evaluation of sexual and gender-based violence programmes must be an integral part of the planning and implementation activities. Keep It Simple and Systematic (KISS).

Conclusion

As Sierra Leone emerges from a conflict situation, let us match our words with action, because it is only when action and words agree that the message becomes loud and clear. The message is 'Violence Prevention against Women and Children'.

Now is the time for all women's organisations, legal and law enforcement agencies, health organisations, religious and traditional leaders, school groups, sports associations, drama groups, the media, men's associations, community-based groups and all well-

meaning Sierra Leoneans to come together to support survivors and help put an end to violence against women and children. Men must also get on board. The prospects of economic growth are threatened if our children and women are not educated. The rallying call for the Global Movement for Children–Sierra Leone partnership as an unstoppable crusade to end at long last, the poverty, ill-health and violence that have destroyed so many young lives is a step in the right direction.

The setting up of a National Commission for War-affected Children with an Ombudsman for children must be pursued vigorously with the right political will.

A prevention and response plan should be designed because sexual violence is a multi-sectoral inter-agency problem, which should be well coordinated.

In short concerted participatory efforts and partnerships are necessary to deal with this all-pervasive problem.

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Woman police officer

The Role of the Police in the Prevention of Violence against Women and Children

Fatmata Kamara
Sierra Leone Police

The ten years of civil war saw a significant increase in violence, sexual abuse and other heinous crimes against women and children in Sierra Leone. Although most of these offences have been unreported, police statistics do indicate an increase.

Many women and children have experienced violence at the hands of fighting forces, ex-combatants, strangers, as well as those with the responsibility to protect them.

These sexual offences have often been characterised by extraordinary brutality and have been frequently preceded or followed by violent acts against other family members.

Similarly, the rebels have also used sexual violence as a weapon to terrorise, humiliate, punish, and ultimately control, the civilian population. The perpetration of sexual violence is often marked by the systematic breaking of taboos and undermining of cultural values. Fathers were forced to watch the raping of their daughters, middle-aged women were raped by boys as young as eleven years old and women were raped in public places.

The abuse of women in the Sierra Leone conflict is rooted in the persistent human rights violations that push women into lower status with limited rights in all spheres of their lives, from home to work.

The Sierra Leone police have a crucial role to play in minimising violence against women and children, and ensuring that justice is done, thus protecting the human rights of women and children. The Sierra Leone police also have the responsibility to ensure the effective implementation of the general recommendations of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women and the UN Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women, both of which emphasise the need for state parties to prevent, prosecute and punish those guilty of violence against women.

In a bid to minimise violence, sexual abuse and other heinous crimes against women and children, the Sierra Leone police offer a 24-hour, 7-day-a week emergency service to battered or otherwise abused women and children. Furthermore, as a frontline service in curtailing violence against women and children, the Sierra Leone police also ensure the enforcement of law and order in relation to violence, sexual abuse and other crimes against women and children.

For this purpose, under the Changed Management Process, a new unit called the Family Support Unit has been established in the Sierra Leone police force, mandated to combat the incidence of sexual abuse of children and the physical abuse of women and children within the 'family' unit. Victims of physical and sexual abuse within the family environment will be provided with a professional and expert police response by the Family Support Unit.

Under the Family Support Unit there will be a Domestic Violence Officer who will provide support and guidance to victims of domestic violence throughout the investigation process and any subsequent court hearing.

In accordance with its constitutional responsibility to protect life and property, to arrest and prosecute offenders, prevent crimes and ensure human rights, the Community Relations Department has embarked on a series of crime prevention initiatives to minimise the incidence of violence and sexual offences at community level.

Prior to the restructuring process of the Sierra Leone police, police response to domestic violence and other forms of violence against women, and child sexual assault, was often inadequate. These offences were regarded by the police as domestic and family problems. The preference was to respond by mediation rather than law enforcement. This way of thinking was based on stereotypical beliefs about gender roles and relations between men and women which acted to obstruct a recognition of criminal behaviour. Police response to these reports normally used to be: 'Go home and settle it. It is family business'; or 'This is a husband-and-wife affair.'

With the present restructuring process, making the police a 'force for good', the Community Relations Department and the Family Support Unit have been working relentlessly to minimise violence and sexual abuse against women and children. These two departments have also embarked on sensitisation programmes in the police stations and police barracks to bring awareness to policemen, police wives and police children on the effects of violence and sexual abuse of women and children.

As a measure to attend promptly to sexually abused victims, the police intend to establish a Sexual Referral Centre, which will comprise trained doctors, trained counsellors, lawyers and trained police officers in the investigation of sexual offences. The centre will provide free medical treatment and counselling services to victims. This referral centre will provide free lodging for a night for victims who may not wish to return home on the same night of the incident.

The management of violent situations and child sexual assault is demanding to an extent that the police alone cannot successfully handle such a situation. Collaborative



Literacy class for police cadets

efforts would be required to minimise the occurrence of violence and other crimes against women and children. The following interventions would therefore enhance and support the Sierra Leone police in its drive to minimise violence against women and child sexual offences.

Society at large has a crucial role to play. Victims and their parents sometimes refuse to report incidents to the police because of scandal. Some victims who make reports to the police are then compromised and withdraw halfway along the line. Some even withdraw at court level. The issue of violence and child sexual assault therefore should be acknowledged as a serious problem that requires priority attention. Sensitisation of society at large regarding the consequences of violence and child sexual abuse is therefore paramount.

Similarly, sensitisation of police officers in dealing with these crimes of violence, sexual assault on women, and child sexual abuse, must include an assessment of stereotypical attitudes to women and children, particularly with regard to sexual activity.

The crucial role of the Sierra Leone police in dealing with crimes of violence, and sexual assault on women and children, must be acknowledged by the police themselves and society in general.

Furthermore, the police must be provided with clear legal powers in order to provide them with an appropriate base for action. The law dealing with violence and child

sexual assault should be reassessed to provide the police with adequate powers in dealing with such crimes: for example Cap. 30 and 31 of the Laws of Sierra Leone, which deal with women and children, are to be revised and amended.

The mass media, in all its forms, must be fully utilised both in public education on the issues and in shaping social attitudes.

The protection of women and children who are at risk from family violence, sexual and other abuses, must be ensured. This should include the provision of safety, security and basic human needs.

Similarly the exchange of information on police methods and technological know how should be encouraged between police stations within Sierra Leone.

A reporting system needs to be established which will enable the government ministries responsible for health, welfare and education to report on sexual abuse cases. Corroborative efforts by providing the Sierra Leone police with all relevant information to pursue such matters must be ensured.

The importance of interdisciplinary cooperation in dealing with violence in the family, sexual abuse of women, and child sexual abuse, must be emphasised. This approach can be achieved in a number of ways. One way could be the establishment of committees functioning at varying levels which would comprise senior police officers, welfare officers, psychiatrists, medically qualified personnel and lawyers to monitor the legal system, initiate reforms where appropriate, and to establish such committees at lower level.

Police response to violence, sexual offences and other crimes against women and children will be inadequate in the absence of proper training. Although violence, sexual abuse, etc., make up a large proportion of police work, police officers have not been provided with the prerequisite training to equip them for this task. Every officer in the Sierra Leone police therefore requires training in handling such violence and sexual assault, and in investigation techniques, and requires knowledge of the work of other agencies offering support to victims. Such training will not only provide general information on violence against women and children, but will also provide an opportunity for officers to air and review their values and beliefs.

In conclusion, the Sierra Leone police are committed to addressing the problem of violence, sexual abuse and other crimes against women and children, which we can only achieve as a law enforcement institution through the collaborative effort of all stakeholders.