

Statement for Thematic session 3: Mainstreaming a gender perspective into the criminal justice system; Addressing the vulnerabilities of children and youth in contact with the criminal justice system.

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My name is Barbara Nakijoba. I am a monitoring and evaluation officer working with the Uganda Youth Development Link. Our mission is to enhance social economic transformation of disadvantaged young people through skills development for self-reliance. Young people who interface with the criminal justice system are at a high risk of exploitation and abuse, and this is worse for the female gender. Youth face GBV and physical violence from law enforcement when extracting confessions from them, especially those convicted for political reasons. Young people suffer serious disconnect at the end of incarceration period as many are denied entry back into the family and community which results into trauma and depression and many resort to hard drugs and violence as a way of coping. As an organization we recommend a more holistic approach to prevention by stakeholder involvement. We also encourage use of alternative approaches to incarceration like use of psychosocial support and economic empowerment to reduce the vulnerability of this category of young people and sports, MDD, and art therapy to address trauma. But above all, meaningful youth engagement by trusting young people with responsibility in their communities and harnessing youths as assets in community development rather than liabilities.