

Gender Development Initiative

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STATEMENT ON CRIMINALIZATION AND JURISDICTION: CULTURE AND TRADITION PERPETRATING TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Gender Development Initiative (GenDi) is a Non–Governmental Organisation committed to the empowerment of disadvantaged children, youths, and women in our society. I am the Executive Director, Gender Development Initiative.

I am proposing the empowerment of local security agencies to prosecute and criminalize culture and traditions that foster trafficking in persons.

Culturally, extended family members are allowed to raise children under the traditional social services, to promote wellbeing and enhance the development of families in general. However, this practise has been marred with exploitation.

The case study of a victim known as Wasa (not real name) and three other siblings would be cited. The case of Wasa was reported to our organization by a concerned community member who alleged that for months, Wasa was sleeping in the bush without clothes., neither given food by the Uncle nor his wife, hence the community took it upon themselves to feed Wasa. The Uncle fights with anyone caught feeding the child or providing the child with amenities. Background check revealed that Wasa had 3 other siblings, the mother left the Dad while Dad is bed-ridden. His junior Brother took the custody of the children and gave them out as house-help to people in indifferent parts of the country. This went on for many years.

The organization met Wasa’s father who alleged that his brother had given out his children for house-help purposes without remitting the money. Wasa was malnourished, a seven-year-old boy with the feature and looks of a two years old, taken to the hospital, placed on oxygen, with multiple health complications and under intensive care due to long exposure to weather. The mother was traced. At the end of the day, Wasa died days after. The local law enforcements agents made attempt to track down the Uncle, but because the justice system within the state, lacked the power to prosecute such a case, the case was transferred to the major body in charge of cases on trafficking in persons. The three other siblings were traced to various parts of the country. The siblings were alien to one another due to long years of separation. The Ministry of Women Affairs took over the care of the siblings. Persons involved in the chain were arrested and put in custody, but later released. The persons who accommodated the siblings as house-helps were not arraigned nor prosecuted.

The local security office that effected the arrest of the perpetrators before they were carted away to the major body in charge of cases of trafficking in person did a fantastic job, but the law does not empower them to try cases in court or to keep perpetrators for more than a particular time frame. They were handicapped.

Our local laws need to be reorganised and the traditional laws revisited so that people don’t take advantage of these laws to traumatise children.

Thank you.

Ashimolowo Olubunmi