

**Remarks by H.E. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf
at Launch of the Anti-Rape Campaign
Ministry of Gender & Development
Wednesday, May 1, 2013**

(As Delivered)

Fellow Citizens;
Partners of Liberia:

Sexual violence is a growing concern in our country, especially the rape of children. Statistics from the Ministry of Gender and Development show that of all of the rape cases reported from the 15 counties, over 60 percent are children under 14 years of age, with girls being sexually abused more often but boys, too, have been victimized.

In 2012, 2,493 sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) cases were reported, up from 2,383 cases the previous year. County statistics show that Montserrado accounts for the highest number (1,493) of reported rapes, followed by Margibi (180), Bong (139), and Grand Cape Mount (104).

Other counties such as: Bomi, 92; Grand Bassa, 84; Lofa, 71; Gbarpolu and Maryland, 66 each; Nimba, 61; Grand Gedeh, 38; River Cess, 36; River Gee, 31; Grand Kru, 22; and Sinoe, with 9.

We commend the people of Sinoe County. We know there are cases of under-reporting or not reporting, but at least on the basis of the statistics before us, Sinoe has the least number of incidences, and we will say to the Superintendent and those from Sinoe County, we thank you and ask that you continue to work on it so that you have a zero in the next report.

The reason I gave these numbers is that they are too many. Even one rape case is enough.

We are falling short when it comes to prosecuting SGBV cases –sexual and gender-based violence against women, rape being one of the highest. As you’ve heard, when cases are sent to the courts, it is very hard to get evidence and most times rape is not given the highest priority. Let me say to the judge, who said that the rape punishment is too lenient: You probably ought not to be a judge.

Of the 30 cases received in Bong County in 2012, only two were tried, with one conviction. In Montserrado, only 49 cases were on the docket during the February and August Terms of Court – 15 were tried, 8 guilty, 5 not guilty and 2 cases dismissed. Domestic violence accounted for 36 cases. During both Terms of Court, Madam Minister, a total of 101 cases were considered *nolle prosequoi.*, which means they withdrew the case from the court, probably for lack of evidence.

Justice, I know you talk about prevention, but that’s not enough; we have to get convictions. We have done some things to address the problem; some of them have been mentioned by the Minister of Justice: passage of the Rape Law to increase the penalty for perpetrators; bail is not allowed in rape cases, except by judges without perspective; the SGBV Crimes Unit has been established to prosecute rape cases; Criminal Court E to fast-track such cases; Ministers and others are working with the hospitals, as mentioned by the Minister of Gender; they’ve launched mobile trial screening to ensure confidentiality.

Sadly, with all of these responses, with all of these mechanisms in place, the heinous crime of rape continues to claim the lives of children – our country’s future leaders. We listened to those kids. Let me cite a few: we lost Sarah Mulbah, age 8, on July 31, 2012; Comfort Maname, age 13, on September 13, 2012; Massa Flomo, age 10; Olivia Zinne Gbanjah who, in 2007, at age 7, was raped in Todee, by her Uncle Joseph Nupolu who was never arrested, and who finally died – may he go to hell – on December 18, 2012.

Still others are struggling to survive: Tenneh Zuannah, age 10 months; Mary Kenemy, age 13, who was raped once by a neighbor and then by her uncle; and Miatta Clerk, age 10.

More recently, as mentioned by the Minister of Justice, seven children, ages 6-14, in the Battery Factory area, raped and sodomized, videotaped by the perpetrators, which meant that they had no feeling of guilt, by a 43-year-old Lebanese national. We can't allow you to come here to enjoy the safety of our country and rape our children! No!

I said to the Minister of Justice that we need some unorthodox means. We don't know what exactly they are but we will find it. If the judges wouldn't act, give the rapists to the women. Anyway, the Justice Minister winking to me that I mustn't go too far. But this is serious. I mean, you know we have been smiling and sometimes laughing and say it; but as we sat there listening to the children, both the Justice Minister and I were trying to wipe tears from our eyes. We are still sad.

We need to continue to work on this. Focus on prevention might be the most effective tool that involves parents, relatives, communities, judicial and traditional leaders, that must all come together. Keep your eyes open for your children of the community. This was cited by others, by the Minister, what happened during the old days when everyone in the community protected every other one, particularly the children.

Take responsibility for children on the street. When you see them hanging around video parlours, please get out and encourage them to go home. Another issue to address is for people selling beer to five-year olds. There's a case to the Ministry of Commerce where the seller should know better... because they think they can get away with it.

Community watch forums and civil society organizations should be more vigilant; involve women, girls, boys, together to discuss this; if you do that effectively because it takes away someone's future, in some cases someone's life.

Why should your children live, be allowed to go to school, be allowed to have a profession and somebody else's child should not?

Traditional leaders, Chief Zanzan [Karwon], it's not the right reason. You dress this way, you dress that way, it's wrong. I wish everybody will wear lappa like I wear it; but I don't care what they wear, people must not do it. So we call upon you, to take that message into all the counties and tell the women, tell the zoes, tell the teachers, to protect our children.

Preventing rape is also the responsibility of parents. They must talk to their children, monitor their friends, tell them what places to avoid, what actions to take. If their child reports being raped, they must not compromise the case. That's part of the reason why we can't get convictions it's because they get compromise; sometimes for money, sometimes for fear of not being victimized. You've got to be brave enough to report it.

We must all bind our voices when it comes to rape. Teachers, parents, lawyers, jurors, judges, we must all work together to ensure that our women and children are safe. You must stand up against rape.

With these words, it will bring sadness in my heart, with a commitment to go after them; we know some of them to make sure that we set the example. Set the example Madam Minister; one or two, three or four, high or low, rich or poor. Protect our children. I now declare the Anti-Rape Campaign launched, and call on everyone to play a role in its effective implementation.