

Lagos Speaks on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

As part of this year's **16 days of Activism on Violence against Women**, the Justice for All programme (J4A) organised a conference to mobilise support for a more coordinated response to the scourge of sexual assault and rape. The conference held in Lagos on 4 December also targeted stakeholders to provide support for the continuation and expansion of the Mirabel Centre and similar Sexual Assault Referral Centres (SARCs) across Lagos.

Lagos State policy makers and officers were out in force, led by the Attorney-General. Also present were police officers, lawyers, medical practitioners, gender activists and many civil society organisations on behalf of citizens.

In his address, Lagos State Attorney-General & Commissioner for Justice, Mr.



Ade Ipaye, reassured the audience that **"the Lagos State**

Lagos State Attorney-General & Commissioner for Justice, Ade Ipaye with Lola Rhodes-Vivour, Lagos State Ministry of Justice

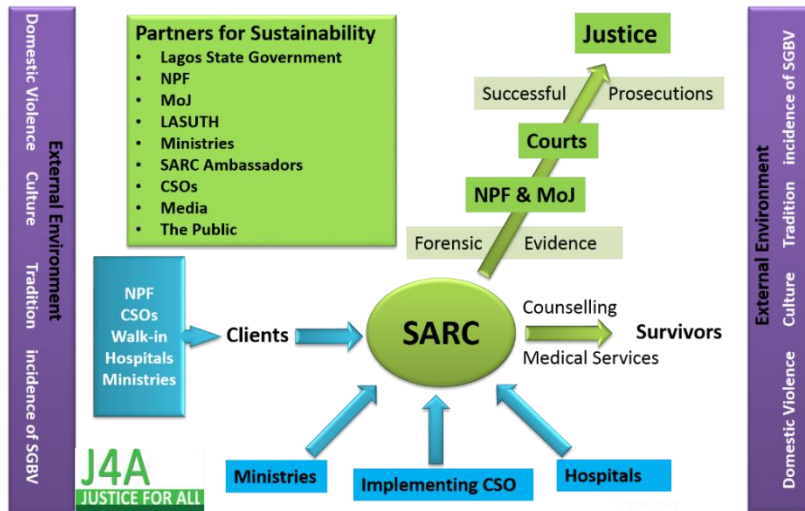
Government takes the matter of SGBV very seriously" and charged everyone to **"break the culture of resolving this criminal act privately within the family ... because if we do not bring offenders to book the culture of silence will be perpetuated"**.

Alex Muoka of the Nigerian Bar Association, observed **"We don't just want to read about cases of rape in the papers, we want to read about convictions of perpetrators!"**

A host of personalities from the entertainment industry including Ice Prince, Bimbo Akintola, Koffi, Queen Uba and Wana Udobang, all of whom are Goodwill Ambassadors of the Mirabel Centre, also put in an appearance. The celebrities publicly pledged their support and commitment to the campaign against sexual and gender-based violence in Lagos State.

"It is the perpetrators who should be ashamed and not the victims"
Goodwill Ambassador, Queen Ubah





The Conference focused on the critical need for all those involved in the fight against SGBV to work together in a coordinated way as illustrated in the diagram alongside.

Each agency / organisation was given the chance to speak about their own contribution. It was notable from the police and

Ministry of Justice presentations that they are taking the issue of SGBV much more seriously. The number of cases being charged to court has multiplied and the Ministry has created a special team to focus on gaining convictions for sexual assault.

The Mirabel Centre and its sister SARC from Enugu spoke about the experiences that some victims go through and CSOs from the Lagos sector showed what they are doing to help. The CSO coalition “WG8 on Violence Against Women” briefed the conference on how they were working



Ito Eze-Anaba, Partnership for Justice (Managers of Mirabel Centre SARC)

together and with the authorities to combat SGBV.

In 16 months, the Mirabel Centre has provided medical and counselling services to 361 victims of sexual violence including 220 under 18 years old. So far, 25 of the alleged perpetrators of these assaults have been charged to court.

The day ended with short presentations from sister DFID programmes NSRP and V4C who are also doing important work on Violence against Women. DFID itself pledged continued support for Nigerian efforts in this area.

The clear message that resonated

through the day was that Sexual and Gender Based Violence is an epidemic that can only be slowed with coordinated effort and commitment from multiple agencies and groups, starting with citizens and **What are you doing to help?** going all the way up to the Government.