

UNBELIEVABLE SEXUAL MISCONDUCT OF CLERICS' RELATIVES QUESTIONED

By Rhyman Agaba

Bishops from Arua district came under the spotlight on Thursday after Compassion International, an international non-government organisation, raised a red flag over reports of sexual abuse of the children that it supports.

Addressing over 40 bishops from various religious denominations at Hotel Africana in Kampala on Thursday, Compassion International national director Emmanuel Ahimbisibwe asked the clerics to rein in on perpetrators of sexual abuse, lest they lose project funding.

Compassion International Uganda is a Christian organisation that is in partnership with over 487 churches in 124 districts to support 161,275 vulnerable children in terms of education and other needs.

MOLESTING CHILDREN

Without revealing the name, Ahimbisibwe said a bishop's son has been accused of sexually molesting children under his care.

"There is a church leader we engaged over his son, who had committed sexual offences, but when we confronted him (the church leader), he told us, 'you

BISHOPS WARNED AGAINST SEXUAL OFFENCES COVER UP



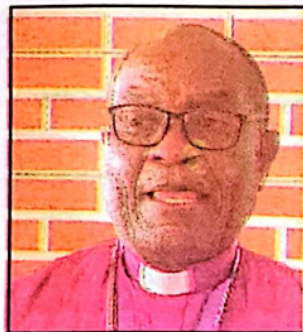
Ahimbisibwe

cannot come from that far to tell me how to run my family'," Ahimbisibwe revealed.

The revelation attracted dead silence in the room.

Ahimbisibwe also called for caution on the frequent transfer of staff, especially those accused of various malpractices.

"There is someone who was shifted to four different



The Rt. Rev. Paul Suubi

frontline Church partners in four different regions, and in all of them, he was accused of sexual misconduct. That is unbelievable," he stated.

Ahimbisibwe told the clerics to be exemplary to children.

"These children see us as their parents, for lack of a better word. Really, how can you be spreading the disease?" he wondered.

CHURCH'S RESPONSE

When contacted to comment about the allegations of sexual harassment, the Church of Uganda spokesperson, Adams Sadiiki, said the institution had not received any official complaint regarding the matter. He also added that the Church of Uganda maintains a cordial and transparent working relationship with Compassion International and all other partners.

"Under our partnership framework, there are clearly established safeguarding and case reporting procedures that are strictly followed whenever any concern arises," he said.

Sadiiki said the Church of Uganda remains fully committed to the protection and well-being of all children and vulnerable persons under its care and strongly condemns all forms of abuse.

In a telephone interview, Bishop Paul Hannington Suubi of East Busoga Diocese said the best way to fight such vices is to empower women and girls. "We should empower the girl child so that they know what to do. Otherwise, sexual harassment is a big challenge in this country," he said.

Pastor Martin Sempa, the founder of the Makerere Community Church, described the reports as isolated incidents.

"I have known Compassion since I was a young boy in my teen years, when it was led by Dr Jack Masiko. He was the head and he was my elder at Kampala Baptist Church. I never heard of such incidents.

"So, to me, this is an isolated incident and I'm glad that it was highlighted by Ahimbisibwe, so that it can be corrected," Sempa revealed.

FRAUDULENT BEHAVIOUR

In addition to complaints of sexual misconducts surrounding church personnel, the national director of Compassion International, Emmanuel Ahimbisibwe cautioned clerics against fraudulent behaviour.

"We recently supported churches with biometric systems to simplify attendance records, but we have learned that some have intentionally registered fingerprints of their cooks and cleaners to defraud the system, so that when he is absent, his assistant can fill in for them," he revealed.

Ahimbisibwe said they are conducting a nationwide risk assessment with the purpose of weeding out such people.

Sempa said: "Even in the Bible, where in the days of Eli, we read about some cases of isolated improprieties. But I'm glad that they are being sorted out."