

LETTER OF THE DAY

The grim reality of sexual violence: A call to action beyond statistics

The release of the 2025 Annual Crime Report by the Uganda Police Force offers a sobering reflection of the state of our society. While the report indicates a slight downward trend in overall sex-related crimes, dropping from 14,425 cases in 2024 to 12,606 in 2025; the devil, as they say, is in the details.

Beneath these figures lies a harrowing narrative of vulnerability, systemic failure, and a culture that continues to prey on its most innocent members: our women and girls.

The data is nothing short of an indictment. Out of 12,700 victims of sex-related crimes last year, a staggering 10,654 were female juveniles. Perhaps most disturbing is the breakdown of defilement cases. We are not just dealing with "stranger danger"; we are facing a crisis within our institutions of trust. When 94 pupils are defiled by their teachers, 65 by guardians, and 40 by their own parents, the "sanctuary" of the home and school is revealed to be a facade for many Ugandan children.

The physical and psychological toll on the 7,750 victims aged 15-17 is immeasurable. These are not just numbers; they represent lives shattered by HIV contraction, unwanted pregnancies, and the heavy shroud of clinical depression.

However, the police report also highlights a secondary crisis: the bottleneck of justice. Of the 12,606 cases registered, only 5,844 reached the courts, and a mere 790 secured convictions. When 4,610 cases remain pending and thousands more stay under inquiry, the message sent to perpetrators is one of near-impunity. In rape cases specifically, the conviction rate is even more dismal, only 22

convictions from 1,675 reported cases. This judicial sluggishness emboldens offenders and silences survivors.

We must also acknowledge the "dark figure" of crime. The Police themselves admit that these numbers are likely the tip of the iceberg. Stigma, victim-blaming, and the intimidation of survivors mean that thousands of crimes never make it into a police ledger.

As we observe sexual assault awareness month (SAAM) this April, it is not enough to simply read these reports with passing sympathy. The theme of prevention must move from policy papers to our dinner tables, our pulpits, and our classrooms.

We must:

Strengthen the Judiciary: Prioritise the disposal of sex-related cases to ensure that "justice delayed" does not continue to be "justice denied."

Empower bystanders: Shift the culture from one of looking away to one of active intervention.

Utilise every platform: Sexual assault happens anywhere, in schools, homes, sacred places, at workplaces, public transport, on streets and online.

Therefore, whether it is a sermon in a mosque, a post on X, Facebook, TikTok, or a community meeting, the message must be clear: sexual violence is preventable, and consent is non-ne-

gotiable.

The 2025 report shows we are making marginal progress in numbers, but the "shocking vulnerability" of our girls suggests we are losing the moral war. It is time to stop treating sexual violence as a "women's issue" and start treating it as the national security emergency it truly is.

Be the change. Use your voice this month to ensure that the 2026 report tells a story of justice found, not just crimes recorded.

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