Zambia: 'Stiff Punishment for Child Defilers Not a Solution'

By Perpetual Sichikwenkwe

CHILD Justice Forum of the Judiciary chairperson, Aridah Chulu says the fight against defilement should start with establishing the root cause of the problem.

Ms Chulu, who is Lusaka Principal Magistrate, said meting out stiff punishment to defilers may not deter would-be offenders from sexually abusing girls.

She was speaking in Lusaka during the launch of a report dubbed 'They are destroying our future'.

During the same occasion, there was a panel discussion on the theme 'Sexual violence against girls in Zambia's schools'.

And Inspector General of Police Stella Libongani said the number of gender-based violence (GBV) cases reported reduced from 615 in the first quarter of this year to 474 in the second quarter.

Ms Libongani said that was an indication that sensitisation programmes being carried out by the police and other stakeholders were yielding positive results.

The discussion was hosted by Women-in-Law in Southern Africa (WLSA) and United States of America-based Cornell University at the American Embassy.

Ms Chulu said GBV cases in the country could be resolved by stakeholders paying more attention to finding out the root cause of the problem than meting out stiffer punishment to perpetrators.

She noted that despite harsh punishments such as jailing defilers to 60 years, the vice was still on the rise.

"It is not the sentencing that will deter would-be offenders but as a country, we need to deal with the root cause of the problem.

"We need to know what causes some fathers to defile their children, what causes teachers to defile their pupils because we have seen that despite some perpetrators being sentenced to 60 years, the problem has not stopped," Ms Chulu said.

United States Agency for International Development mission director for Zambia, Susan Brems said the fight against GBV required the keen participation of all stakeholders.

The report showed that 47 per cent of Zambian women had been victims of violence since the age of 15 and that one in 10 women had experienced sexual violence.

About 54 per cent of students interviewed stated that they had either known about male teachers sexually harassing or abusing female students.

The report recommended that the Ministry of Education should enact a national child protection policy and implement it effectively.

WLSA national coordinator Maimbo Ziela said the report was aimed at helping stakeholders identifying gaps and encourage everyone to get involved in the fight against GBV.