



Press Release
7 May 2019

Women in Mwanza Kusini in Kigoma face rape and violence **Since 2016, a significant number of women have had their homes invaded and experienced sexual violence through *Teleza***

7 May 2019, Dar es Salaam: Scores of women in Kigoma are living in fear since 2016 because of an organised crime phenomenon known as *Teleza*. Women, particularly those who live without men in their homes, are at risk of having their homes broken into by unknown men and then being raped or, if they resist, facing violent retaliation.

These stories have been released by a coalition of civil society organisations including the Legal and Human Rights Centre, Tamasha, Change Tanzania, the Centre for Strategic Litigation, JamiiForums, and Twaweza. The issue was uncovered this year while a number of these organisations were conducting fieldwork in Kigoma.

Data on the extent of the phenomenon are not yet available due to challenges in collecting data around sexual violence including the lack of reporting due to fear of stigma and retaliation. However, in three days of investigating the phenomenon, the organisations were able to identify and document over 45 stories and incidents dating back from 2016 to this year, 2019.

These rapes have certain common features, namely:

- They are perpetrated against women who are living without men in the house (widows, divorcees, young girls, older women, or even women whose husbands are travelling)
- The perpetrators roam neighbourhoods with their bodies covered in oil or grease or a slippery substance of some kind, making them difficult to catch. This is where the name *Teleza* comes from.
- The perpetrators often incapacitate neighbours or the other members of the household either through drugging them or locking them in their houses
- The men are armed, often with *pangas*, and victims are threatened with these weapons to stop them from resisting. But many do fight back and suffer very serious injuries as a result. Those who stay silent in an effort to minimize personal injury, are often targeted again and again.

Beyond the obvious psychological and physical trauma, these attacks lead to significant other negative impacts:

- death of the victim(s)
- destruction of relationships – those women who are in relationships are often abandoned after being the victims of an attack
- economic deprivation as the women are often unable to work after the attacks and are often forced to take loans or sell belongings to pay for their treatment
- the significant risk of being infected with HIV/AIDs and other sexually transmitted diseases

The community and authorities in the area appear not to have ignored these women and the crimes being committed against them. Victims are often sent away, jeered at and humiliated by (often male) police officers. Even when they can identify perpetrators, either no action is taken or the men are held for short periods and then released. The community also accuses these women of being prostitutes, or of somehow deserving of the crimes being committed against them. When the survivors seek treatment, they are further exploited by being charged five thousand shillings (TZS 5,000) for PF3 forms, and being subject to additional disrespectful and cruel questioning.

In, light of these disturbing crimes, the coalition is calling for:

- An official visit to Kigoma Urban, by the Minister for Home Affairs, specifically to address the *Teleza* phenomenon including meetings with the women survivors, local leaders and police officers
- An official statement to the public and media from the Ministry of Home Affairs, condemning *Teleza* and guaranteeing that swift action will be taken against all perpetrators involved
- Creating a special task force with police officers, local leaders and representatives from women's groups to investigate and address the phenomenon
- An open discussion in Kigoma with the survivors, members of the coalition and relevant local and national government representatives to devise strategies for public education, to increase community support for the victims of this horrific violence
- The Ministry of Home Affairs, the Ministry of Health, Community Development, Gender, the Elderly and Children, and the President's Office – Regional Administration and Local Government to work with women's support organizations to improve the capacity of the gender desk of the police force to deliver compassionate support to victims in Kigoma-Ujiji and elsewhere

Churchill Shakim, Executive Director of Tamasha said *"These stories tell of human suffering met with negligence on the part of authorities. We are determined to support the women of Mwanza Kusini to raise their voices and claim back their homes and communities."*

Advocate Anna Henga, Executive Director of the Legal and Human Rights Centre, said *"The government's first responsibility is to ensure the security of citizens, especially those unable to defend themselves. The ongoing rapes in Kigoma should prompt swift and decisive action."*

Deus Valentine Rweyemamu, Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for Strategic Litigation, said *"The lack of response from police and other authorities adds insult to these women's injuries. We need to entrench a culture of rule of law in the country such that we no longer hear stories of powerless victims who are offered no comfort or support by those charged with protecting them."*

Mshabaha Mshabaha, National Coordinator of ChangeTanzania, said *"When women suffer, families and communities suffer too. Teleza presents a direct challenge to economic progress and development in Kigoma. We urge security organs in the country to treat this matter with utmost gravity. No citizen should feel unsafe or afraid for so long."*

Maxence Melo, Founder and Executive Director of JamiiForums, said *"We have a duty and a responsibility to amplify the voices of those who may not have access to the same platforms and opportunities as we do. This is core to the work of civil society – ensuring that the voiceless, the ignored and the long-suffering are heard."*

Aidan Eyakuze, Executive Director of Twaweza, said: *“These stories reveal a community in Kigoma under siege. We must take immediate action to alleviate these women’s suffering. And we need to work hard to ensure that there are no other corners of this country in which women suffer silently in this way.”*

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For more information:

Annastazia Rugaba, Manager – Advocacy, Twaweza
e: arugaba@twaweza.org | t: (+255) (0) 687 222 197

Notes to Editors

- Anonymized testimonials collected by the coalition are available as an attachment to this press release
- Members of the coalition are Legal and Human Rights Centre, Tamasha, Centre for Strategic Litigation, ChangeTanzania, JamiiForums and Twaweza.