

Yei commissioner vows to fight violence against women and children

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November 28, 2012 (YEI) - The Commissioner of Yei County in South Sudan's Central Equatoria State, Juma David Augustine, said on Tuesday that his administration will "not relent" in fighting all forms of violence against women and children.

"Our State government in collaboration with our partners and other right institutions and agencies has over the years supported numerous efforts to harmonise legislation with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international child rights treaties."

Augustine said, "this has been essential to providing a firm legal basis for developing child protection mechanisms, services and structures."

A week ago, South Sudanese parliamentarians' commemorated the 23rd Convention of the Rights of Children (CRC), which the 16-month-old nation has not ratified. The CRC is the first legally binding international instrument to incorporate the full range of human rights civil, cultural, economic, political and social rights, spells out the basic human rights that children everywhere have: the right to survival; to develop to the fullest; to protection from harmful influences, abuse and exploitation; and to participate fully in family, cultural and social life.

In the context of agreeing to undertake the obligations of the convention, national governments commit themselves to protecting and ensuring children's rights and decide to be held accountable for this commitment before the international community.

The country's parliament has made some efforts to domesticate the CRC through legislation such as the South Sudan Child of Act of 2008 but still faces "some challenges" in the implementing the convention, according to the United Nations Children's Agency (UNICEF).

UNICEF's Officer in Charge, Elizabeth Quaye, when commemorating the 23rd anniversary of the CRC on 20 November, said: "To cement these efforts and to ensure greater investment, the Republic of South Sudan needs to demonstrate to the rest of the world its commitment to its children by ratifying the CRC."

Since the 20 November, Yei County has held 16 days of activism against gender based violence.

Speaking at a gathering in Yei's central square, Commissioner Augustine said that research in 2009 and 2010, in which he participated before his recent appointment, coupled with subjective evidence, showed that children face different forms of abuses and violence in their homes, schools, communities and workplaces despite the national laws put in place by the state and the advocacy by the non-governmental organizations.

"Before I became a commissioner, we conducted a research and we saw an increase in the number of media reports of well investigated and prosecuted cases of child rights violation relating to sexual nature."

But since 2010, according to the Commissioner, the situation in schools has improved since an open public statement was made by South Sudan's central government, that corporal punishment is abolished in schools and that alternatives to it be developed as a guide for teachers in the country.

However, he admitted that South Sudan is still "faced with the challenge of providing a protective environment for children that has an effective monitoring system to record the incidents and nature of child protection abuses and allow informed strategic responses."

Commissioner Augustine pointed that such systems can only be effective if they are participatory and involve local institutions.

He stressed that it is the responsibility of government to make sure that all citizens are aware of the rights of children with regard to violence, abuse and exploitation, especially as much of the violence against children goes unreported.

"There are cases which are never investigated because they are never brought to the attention of relevant institutions" such as the police or the state ministry of social development.

Violence against women was also major problem, he said.

"There are men beating women badly in their houses daily. There also people beating their children irresponsibly in their houses. Actually there are events where cases are never reported and investigation or prosecution are never carried out by

the police due to capacity constraints and the unwillingness of worthy witnesses to testify or cooperate with the investigators, or fear of tarnishing the victim's family name, which can be really disheartening," he said.

The official explained that child protection is a set of services designed to protect children and young people who are under-age and to encourage family stability.

To address child protection effectively it cannot be treated as a "separate and a stand-alone issue. Given the relationships between child protection and other areas, it is valuable to consider the protection aspects of any issue being considered."

In South Sudan, child marriage (under the age of 18) remains prevalent. One of the rights accorded to children under the convention is the Right to Protection from Early Marriage.

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