

## PRESS RELEASE, 26 MAY 2015

### **His Excellency President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan signs the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Bill (2013) into law**

Press conference held by Legislative Advocacy Coalition on Violence Against Women (LACVAW)

On Monday the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2015, President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan signed the Violence Against Persons (Prohibition) Bill (2013) into law. The new Act aims to 'Eliminate Violence in Private and Public Life, Prohibit All Forms of Violence Against Persons, and to Provide Maximum Protection and Effective Remedies for Victims and Punishment of Offenders'. The law addresses the gaps in current laws on violence in private and public spaces, addressing old as well as new forms of violence; establishing institutional mechanisms to prohibit violence and a regulatory body for administering the Act's provisions, including a co-ordinator for the prevention of domestic violence.

The VAPP Bill is the result of a 14-year-long process of activism in civil society that began at a legislative advocacy workshop on violence against women in 2001 in Abuja. By the end of the workshop, participants agreed to form a coalition – the Legislative Advocacy Coalition Against Violence Against Women (LACVAW) – to pursue the goal of pushing for a national Bill prohibiting violence against women. The content of the Bill is home grown, reflecting the realities of violence in Nigeria today even as it incorporates provisions based on Nigeria's commitment to international human rights principles. First presented to the House of Representatives in May 2002, the Bill on Violence Against Women became a Bill on Violence Against Persons in 2008 when it was harmonised with 8 other Bills on gender based violence in the National Assembly.

Under the newly enacted law, the following are all offences: spousal battery (s.19); forceful ejection from home (s.9); forced financial dependence or economic abuse (s.12); harmful widowhood practices (s.15); female circumcision or genital mutilation (s.6); harmful traditional practices (s.20); substance attacks (s.21); political violence (s.23) and violence by state actors (s.24). Victims of violence are entitled to comprehensive medical, psychological, social and legal assistance by

accredited service providers and government agencies; and their identities must be protected during court cases.

LACVAW would like to sincerely thank His Excellency President Goodluck Ebele Jonathan for signing the Violence Against Persons (Bill) into law – an historic action for which he will be forever remembered. We would also like to thank our numerous champions in the National Assembly – Sen. Umaru Dahiru Tambuwal, Sen. Victor Ndoma Egba, Sen. Ita Enang, Sen. Ike Ekweremadu, Sen. Helen Esuene, Sen. Eme Ufot Ekaette, Hon. Aminu Waziri Tambuwal, Hon. Mulikat Adeola-Akande, Hon. Albert Sam-Tsokwa, Hon. Abike Dabiri, Hon. Farouk Lawan, Hon. Christie Alaaga, Hon. Beni Lar, Hon. Ahmed Ali, Former Speaker House of Representatives Rt. Hon. Aminu Bello Masari, former member House of Representatives Hon. Saudatu Sani, Hon. Nkem Abonta, Hon. Betty Apiafi, former Hon. Binta Masi Garba, former member House of Representatives and now Senator, Hon. Florence Aya with whom we started the advocacy for the VAPP Bill. We applaud the efforts of the Hon. Minister for Women's Affairs and Social Development, Hajiya Zainab Maina, in supporting the enactment of this legislation.

The Gender Technical Unit (GTU), strategically situated in the NASS and with whom LACVAW partnered, was invaluable in tracking and pushing for legislative processes to be finalised in the last days of the current administration. LACVAW would like to acknowledge the support of development partners in this process – especially the International Human Rights Law Group, now Global Rights, Voices for Change, Justice for All, UNFPA, UNICEF, UN Women, ActionAid Nigeria, *NSRP*, Ipas, Oxfam, Equality Now and the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWRS). Support has also come from stakeholders such as the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs and Social Development, the National Human Rights Commission, the Nigeria Police Force, public and private print and electronic media, the more than 50 organisations and individuals comprising LACVAW, and the former and current LACVAW Secretariats, WRAPA and FIDA, respectively.

The length of time it has taken LACVAW to get this far is an indication of how deeply violence against women is tolerated in the society. Whilst a new law prohibiting violence is not sufficient to change this situation, it is necessary to send a message that the state accepts its responsibility to ensure that impunity for such action no longer prevails. Ultimately, the message that it is no longer 'business as usual' relies on turning the letter of the law into practice. LACVAW, which

presented the Bill in the first place and has worked unrelentingly over a span of four Assemblies since then, is set poised for the next phase of this journey – implementation.

Currently, the VAPP Act is only applicable within the FCT. For it to become a national law, it needs to be passed in 23 out of the 36 States of the federation. The following 13 States have enacted related legislation – Anambra (Prohibition of Infringement of A Widow's and Widower's Fundamental Rights law); Cross River (Prohibition of Domestic Violence Against Women and Maltreatment of Widows law and Girl-Child Marriages and Female Circumcision [Prohibition] law); Ebonyi (Abolition of Harmful Traditional Practices Against Women and Children law); Edo (Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation law and Inhuman Treatment of Widows [Prohibition] law); Ekiti (Gender Based Violence [Prohibition] law); Enugu (Prohibition of Infringement of Widow and Widower Fundamental Rights law); Katsina (A Law on Rape); Kogi (Violence Against Persons [Prohibition]) Bill; Lagos (Domestic Violence Act); Niger (Anti Rape Law); Ondo (A Bill on Harmful Traditional Practices Affecting the Health of Women and Children and Related Matters); Oyo (A Bill Protecting the Inheritance Rights of Widows, Prohibition of Harmful Traditional Practices Against Widows and Other Related Matters); Rivers (Female Circumcision Law). LACVAW calls on its partners to continue to support the process of enacting anti-violence legislation at the State level, in order to realise the vision of comprehensive national legislation prohibiting all forms of violence against all Nigerians - wherever they find themselves in the federation.

LACVAW has received the good news that the Plateau State House of Assembly has passed the Gender and Equal Opportunities (GEO) Bill last Monday and the Executive Governor assented to the law this morning. This brings to five the number of States that have passed the GEO Law. The others are Imo, Ekiti, Kogi, and Anambra.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, the work has just begun. As we celebrate the birth of the VAPP Act, LACVAW implores us to gear up for the more difficult tasks of: a) popularizing the law, so that women, counsels and response institutions become aware of its availability; b) close monitoring for compliance with and award of its protection and reliefs for survivors; and c) ensuring accountability for perpetrators in order to end impunity. The struggle for the passage of the VAPP Law and any other complementary legislation to prohibit the violation of the bodily integrity of women and girls is a struggle that we must sustain. We want to leave the stage

confident that our daughters and the generation of girls yet unborn will live in a society that is responsive and protective of their human dignity.

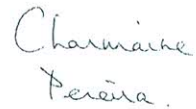
Thank you for listening and God bless the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Signed,



Saudatu Mahdi, MFR

Sec. Gen. WRAPA  
Group



Charmaine Pereira, PhD

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