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JOINT PRESS STATEMENT IN COMMEMORATION OF INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY-2024; ADDRESSING THE FEMICIDE OF SEX WORKERS IN UGANDA

The sex worker-led organizations under the coordination of the Network of Key Population Service Organisations (UNESO) in collaboration with Ubuntu Law and Justice Center (UBUNTU) are joining women all over the world to commemorate **March 8th** International Women's Day. This day celebrates the cultural, political, and socio-economic achievements of all women in their diversities.

This year's International Women's Day theme **“Invest in women: Accelerate progress”** resonates deeply with our work and mission at both UNESO and UBUNTU. Women cannot achieve progress at any rate let alone an accelerated rate unless they can live violence-free lives. Women in Uganda are being massacred and living under a constant threat of femicide, an extreme manifestation of violence against women. The picture is particularly grim for marginalised communities including sex workers and sexual and gender minorities who face intersecting and multiple vulnerabilities, inequalities, and criminalisation.

According to the police annual crime report 2022, a total of 17,698 country-wide Gender Based Violence cases with related murders were reported for women. The Demographic and Health Survey 2016, indicates that women are more than twice as likely to experience violence as opposed to their male counterparts.

Today we commemorate the IWD with a press conference mourning and remembering 8 (Eight) sex workers killed in a gruesome manner within three months from December to date in different parts of Uganda. Each of these killings is abhorrent, and the trend is particularly worrying because these killings have taken place with absolute impunity. The sex workers killed include;

1. **Nakuya Madrine**, a resident of Butenga village, was discovered deceased on the morning of 15th December 2023, leaving behind one child.
2. **Esther**, a 25-year-old sex worker from Bwaise, was found dead in her room by a lodge manager on the morning of the 26th of December 2023. The post-mortem examination revealed that she had been fatally stabbed with a sharp object.
3. **Nalanga Lydia**, residing in Kigonbya, was killed on the 11th of January 2024 and her body was dumped on the roadside, where locals later identified her.
4. **Flavia Najjuko**, a resident of Butenga village in Masaka, was found deceased on the morning of 15th January 2024, leaving behind a known child.
5. **Annet** was discovered deceased in a dimly lit room, with suspicions that she was killed during the night. She was a resident of Ntusi Village and left behind a daughter.
6. **Masitullah Nabasirye**, a resident of Lukaya, was found dead on the 4th of February 2024, with indications that she was murdered the previous night.
7. **Kokunda Rena**, aged 29 and residing in Kireka, was found murdered in a pool of blood on the 11th of February 2024.
8. **Nakiwala Rita**, who used to work in the industrial area of Mukono, was found murdered in her room. Originally from Iganga, where she lived with her two children, her body was taken by the police.

In Uganda, the radical criminalization of sex work creates barriers for female sex workers in their diversity to achieve equality in social, economic, and political aspects. Instead of protecting their rights, it exposes them to injustices and human rights violations. Similarly, the Criminal Justice System in the country has not been successful in holding perpetrators accountable and delivering justice for cases of Femicide, thus failing female sex workers just like it fails all women.



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In a world where women, female sex workers, and sexual and gender-diverse people continue to face pervasive gender-based violence, investing in their human rights, sexual reproductive health rights, and well-being is not just a moral imperative but a pathway to achieving true progress. To achieve the UN theme, **Investing in all women** is a fundamental human rights obligation that is essential for reducing gender inequality, empowering women to reach their full potential, and creating inclusive and equitable communities and societies.

Investing in Women will Accelerate Progress to inspire the inclusion of all women in their diversity, which benefits not only our country but also our region, continent, and the entire world. On this premise, we specifically demand the following;

1. The government of Uganda condemns the killings of women including sex workers and declares femicide and the violence against women a national disaster recognizing the urgency and severity of the matter.
2. We urge the government to enforce laws that protect women and girls from violence and ensure accountability for perpetrators of violence against women.
3. We demand for police to conduct thorough, impartial, and independent investigations into all the killings that have taken place, and a commitment from the police to bring the perpetrators to justice.
4. We further demand that the Judiciary fast tracks cases of violence against women and renders swift and speedy trials.
5. The government should commit resources to addressing the root causes of gender based violence and awareness creation to address sex inequality, the objectification of women, and beliefs about masculinity, femininity, relationships, and sex roles.
6. We urge members of Parliament to enact a law on femicide
7. We call upon civil society organisations to join us in solidarity to condemn femicide and advocate for justice for victims of femicide
8. We demand a security report from the government security arms led by police about the causes of the murders as most of the murders are neglected and not well investigated; we need substantive reports on murders.

We urge all stakeholders to join us in ending femicide. Let us create a safe environment where women live violence-free lives without fear or discrimination.

**There is no justification for killing ANY woman;
Femicide is the ultimate violence against Women.**

Signed: