

Rape as a weapon of war



In recent years, global organizations have fought successfully to protect women's rights and gender equality, and Gabon is determined to play its role in maintaining this trend. Gabon is against all forms of violence against women, and recognizes rape as a serious violation of women's rights. Gabon also recognizes that sexual violence is perpetuated by War . Currently, armed conflicts across Africa are forcing many women and children to migrate to unsafe territory, and increasing their vulnerability to poverty, abduction and human trafficking. These conditions directly expose them to rape and forced prostitution .

Prisoners of war are trafficked into Gabon from Benin, Nigeria, Togo and Mali for prostitution, while others are brought as housemaids and eventually forced to become prostitutes . Human trafficking forces many innocent women and children to live in fear of being exploited. However, Gabon is committed to policies which will bring an end to sexual violence, as well as the conflicts which cause them . In 2001, Gabon enacted strict laws for the prosecution of child traffickers. Gabon has also established a national commission to fight child trafficking, chaired by the nation's vice president .

The Gabonese government also set up a free hotline to fight human trafficking and sexual violence in April 2003, in collaboration with UNICEF. This was the first initiative of its kind in Africa. Gabon recognizes that raising awareness of sexual violence against women is crucial to ending it. The government of Gabon is also confident that a centre to provide protection and assistance to the victims of human trafficking established with the assistance of the European Union in March 2002 will help to rehabilitate the lives of many war-ravaged and sexually abused victims .

In January 2002, Gabon joined the the First Specialized Meeting on Child Trafficking and Exploitation in West and Central Africa, in Cote d'Ivoire along with representatives of African countries and UN agencies. Following this meeting, the Yamassoukro Declaration was adopted, upon which Gabon committed to collaborate with other African countries in campaigns against human trafficking . Gabon recognizes the Declaration as a crucial step in uniting womens' vulnerability to rape across the region.

As stated by former Prime Minister Jean- Francois Ntoutoume Emame, the ' empowerment of women' has been a major priority for Gabon. Gabon recognizes that women must be empowered to fight sexual violence, for the battle must be fought with them ang not for them.

Country Report < http://www.protectionproject.org/human_rights_reports/report_documents/gabon.doc> Ibid Ibid Policy Paper No. 14. 2(E) Human trafficking in Nigeria: Root Causes and Recommendations Country Report < http://www.protectionproject.org/human_rights_reports/report_documents/gabon.doc> Ibid Troubnikoff, Anna. Trafficking in Women and Children: Current Issues and Developments. Nova Publishers, 2003 Country Report < http://www.protectionproject.org/human_rights_reports/report_documents/gabon.doc> Press Release No: UNIS/GA/1655. General Assembly Special Session Continues, as Heads of State, High-level Ministers Discuss Initiatives for Social Development. < <http://www.unis.unvienna.org/unis/pressrels/2000/ga1655.html> >