

Dominican Sisters of St Catherine of Siena.

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African Women Human Rights.

(Brief Introduction of ill treatment of African women)

In the years gone by, human rights' violations against women were rampant. Rights abuses such as: sexual harassment, gender discrimination, harsh and punitive widowhood rites, forced childhood marriages, harmful traditional practices, disinheritance of wives and daughters. From birth, females are considered inferior to men, most especially, in developing countries. Most parents preferred, and still prefer, to have male children, probably to carry on the family's name as heir apparent since their female counterparts will definitely marry and change their maiden name some day. Most people believe that the main role of a woman is to perform domestic services, child bearing and only compliment the effort of the husband on his instruction.

Traditionally in Nigeria, is a male-dominated society, though women make up to half of our estimated 140 million population, they are however, only seen than heard. In some places, like Northern Nigeria, women are not even seen at all. They face barriers to full employment and other rights due to ethnicity, culture, religion and inadequate education. Traditionally, African women face deep prejudices, discrimination, and barriers to their progress in areas of education, politics, economics, nutrition, healthcare and equality.

Women in Africa are treated as second class citizens with little or no respect, while also having to cope with physical violence from the Home front. In some African societies, women are punished for committing adultery unlike the opposite sex. Also in some cultures, wives are always accused of being responsible for the death of their husbands as they pass through ordeals, ranging from drinking the water used in bathing their husband's corpse, in order to prove their innocence, and the total dispossession of her late husband's property. In other cases, she is banished into exile by the kinsmen or her in-laws, leaving her with little or nothing. This will further subject her to life of **abject poverty** ,

At the death of a father or husband, female, whether as wives or children, are excluded from the **inheritance bequeathed** by the departed breadwinners. This act is promoted by selfish male and primordial custom and cultures. It is rampant in Africa to treasure boys, this is based on the assumption that boys are more fruitful. There are significant cases where only the boys are sent

to school, leaving the girls behind, thus contributing to the high level of illiteracy amongst girls and women these days. In most cases, the womenfolk are excluded from taking decisions on pressing issues, both in the family and in the society at large, as a result of the assumption that it is a man's world.

Many societies continue to celebrate the birth of a male-child, while a girl born to a family is accorded little or no celebration. What it means is that boys are of more economic importance and generally valued to girls. . The womenfolk are indeed faced with too much of troubles not to talk of the pain in labour and the genital mutilation, which is rampant in developing countries. In fact, the barbaric mutilation, through non-sterilized equipments without anaesthetics, not only exposes the victims to long term health effects such as HIV/AIDS, urinary and reproductive tract infection, it may also lead to premature death from excessive bleeding.

These several unbecoming practices against women clearly violates human rights and dignity of women.

Ways by which we Dominican sisters in Africa help to restore Women Human Rights in Africa.

Women formation.

“ The Rights of women are Human Rights ” several African Dominican sisters congregation s have used it in their various activities with women, adapting the contents to local needs and anxieties. As a result, these sisters created a brochure that helps women to understand various forms of violence. Through the use of concrete examples and several meetings, these women became agents of their own liberation.

Justice, Peace and integrity

Nigeria, Tanzania and Benin have hosted the 2006 meetings of the national representatives of justice and peace. Particular attention was given to the objectives of the Millennium Development. In different countries, accurate informative bulletins are published on the activities and themes related to justice and peace, a simple way to share Good News.

AIDS and the Dominican family

In January 2006 in south Africa, FEDOSA(Federation of Dominican men and women of south Africa), called a meeting with members of the Dominican family who work with persons afflicted with HIV . The sisters have created a network of religious who work to eradicate this pandemic illness.

Education and solidarity.

During the apartheid era in south Africa, the Cabra Dominican sisters decided to open their schools to all races and accepted the risk involved with this desegregation. They were among the

first to openly oppose an obviously unjust political system. They also undertook further public action in solidarity with the oppressed. Their ultimate goal was to ensure freedom without the will to revenge. By their activity in solidarity with the oppressed, they contributed to the truth and reconciliation that in spite of violence, south Africa continues to seek today .

Sanitary Health Care

As Congregation in Nigeria, we sisters are present in three communities: we work in nursery, primary and secondary schools, with infants and adolescents. We try to educate the youths to the truth that sets us free, to the values of life, to the capacity of developing intelligence against every form of ignorance; through means of communication we teach the culture of confrontation with the essential values that form our way of thinking and inter-acting. It is important to understand this to the end of unmasking what pervades our culture.

We are present also in the sanitary field, precisely in the city of Ibadan (about 150 km from Lagos). Families in this city are generally poor, penniless, unable to buy the medicines and to cure the most common or simple diseases, like malaria, an infection, etc. In this situation, people die at every age, but the most frequent victims of this state of things are children and pregnant women.

The sanitary situation of the mentioned locality is made more serious by the presence of many private and abusive pseudo-clinics, whose main purpose is that of getting money from the poor people, rather than that of offering appropriate cures.

Solicited by the strong necessity and spurred by the need of giving an answer, we have started to offer a sanitary service, without making calculations or programmes, but with a spirit of service, thus patients have gone on growing in number and complexity; particularly our maternity centre has become a reference point for pregnant women and children from 0 up to 10 years old.

The complexity of cases that went on increasing, and a sense of inadequacy of the answers given to the demands, went on becoming a lacerating experience, because of what we came to know later, and because of our being without any economic security of funds, since the government grants nothing for the sanitary assistance. Therefore, our Congregation of Dominican Sisters decided to start the building of a hospital, with the desire of offering, in a not too far time, a structure and a service apt to render a service to the sanitary basic needs of the place. Many Italian friends have contributed to the construction of this hospital and many hospitals in Turin have donated plenty of equipments and economic means. Solidarity has become one of the means for the defence of human rights.

Conclusion : I am thankful to FASS for the courage with which it works for the promotion of human rights at all levels of life, particularly for the dignity and defence of women all over the world, mainly in the Third world, where women are victims of violence and injustice: Africa, Nigeria..."The Young will grow"...along journeys towards justice and truth... then the human rights will become a reality and not just a dream. Its high time to give women their rightful place in the nation building.

THANK YOU !.