



GHANA CENTER FOR DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT AND THE ARK FOUNDATION

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PRESS RELEASE

WORLD DAY OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

The Ghana Center for Democratic Development (CDD-Ghana), in collaboration with the Ark Foundation, marked this year's 'World Day of Social Justice' with a Roundtable Discussion on the theme, *Full Implementation and Compliance of Domestic Violence Act (Act 732): Government, Parliament and Judiciary Responsibilities.*

On such a day, it is worth reflecting on how social legislation, passed to address social justice issues as they affect vulnerable persons, are implemented in a manner that satisfy the objectives they are meant to address. One such piece of legislation is the Domestic Violence Act of Ghana.

The passage of the Domestic Violence Act, Act 732 of 2007, was received with great excitement by many citizens, particularly women. The excitement was because the Act's objective is to institute criminal sanctions for perpetrators of domestic violence and offer remedies for domestic violence victims, as well as significantly improve Ghana's compliance with its international human rights obligations.

As part of Government of Ghana's compliance with its obligations, the Domestic Violence (DV) Secretariat and the DV Management Board were established. The Act also established a Domestic Violence Fund. A National Policy and Plan of Action for the Act's implementation was adopted in 2009 to guide institutional and program coordination. Nine years after the Act was passed, the legislative instrument to the Act was adopted by Parliament. All these legal and policy reforms regarding addressing domestic violence were achieved through active advocacy efforts mainly by women's rights organizations and other civil society entities.

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However, government and institutions mandated to comply with the Act have largely failed to do so. Several sections of the Act have either been completely ignored or have seen half-hearted attempts to implement.

For example, Section 9 of the Act 732 instructs that the government sets up the “Victims of Domestic Violence Support Fund” which will seek to cater the basic material needs of victims, training of the victims’ families, rehabilitation and reintegration, construction of reception shelters for victims in the regions and districts and training and capacity building of persons connected with the provision of shelter, rehabilitation and reintegration.

CDD-Ghana and The Ark Foundation would like to remind government, as a matter of urgency, to provide a report to citizens on the status of implementation and compliance with this particular section as reports of battered women, sexual assault survivors and abused children continue to live in the same environment with those who have allegedly perpetrated heinous crimes against them just because they do not have any safe haven.

Government must uphold social justice by ensuring that Ghana has functional shelters not only at the national level but also in the regions and the districts as specified by the Act. These are very critical in ensuring the protection of fundamental human rights and dignity of victims.

Again, CDD-Ghana and The Ark Foundation call on Parliament to use its oversight responsibility to ensure that the Domestic Violence Fund receives reasonable allocation during the reading of the budget. It is also imperative that the Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection provides information on the status of the fund and how institutions and individuals can contribute to the fund to cater for Domestic Violence victims. Ensuring that these provisions work demands the full and immediate attention of the Domestic Violence Management Board and its Secretariat. The DV Management Board and its Secretariat are to ensure coordination and integration between service providers and agencies on all domestic violence matters in the country. They are also to monitor, report and account on the status of implementation. CDD-Ghana and The Ark Foundation call on government to ensure that the Ministry of Gender enables the Board and its Secretariat to work effectively to fulfill their mandate under the Act.

In addition, CDD-Ghana and The Ark Foundation call on the government to accord the Domestic Violence and Victim Support Unit (DOVVSU) its specialized status, by ensuring that the Unit is recognized as such by the Police hierarchy and that it receives the necessary training and resources to perform its assigned responsibilities under the law.

Furthermore, the Judiciary should continue to establish the gender-based violence courts in all the districts to help in the administration of justice to DV victims. The Judiciary

should work closely with stakeholders to provide friendly courts that are sensitive to the needs of child and adult users.

CDD-Ghana and The Ark Foundation commend the media for the good work in highlighting domestic and other sexual and gender based violence cases. The media is also commended for going the extra mile to seek justice for victims and provide material assistance to some of them.

Lastly, CDD-Ghana and The Ark Foundation plead with traditional leaders, opinion leaders and all citizens to desist from attempts to settle domestic violence cases. It is the citizens' duty to report such cases to the police and to ensure the law takes its course and thereby tackle the scourge of impunity in such cases in our communities.

It is through these measures that we can ensure social justice and promote the rights and dignity of all citizens.

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