

Firelight Newsflash! 16 April 2007

Congratulations are in order...

Girls' rights activist Betty Makoni of **Girl Child Network** in Zimbabwe was named the winner of the annual World's Children's Prize for the Rights of the Child on 13 April 2007. Makoni, founder of the Girl Child Network in Zimbabwe, was awarded the Global Friend's Award for her work to help Zimbabwean girls escape trafficking, sexual abuse, child labor and other assault. She was also announced winner of The World's Children's Prize, which is decided by a jury of 15 children who have been exposed to child labor, war or poverty. "I won't say it's my dreams coming true, because dreams shouldn't come true that fast. I have a long way to go and I have a great commitment," she said.

The awards were set up in 1999 by the Swedish Children's World Association to recognize the outstanding contributions of those who defend youth rights. Sweden's Queen Silvia hosted an awards ceremony for the winners outside Stockholm on Monday.

Youth for a Child in Christ (YOCIC) in Zimbabwe has been selected this month as an Partner in the Oxfam International Youth Partnerships (OIYP) program. OIYP is an initiative of Oxfam International, aimed at supporting youth and their work for social change. Through the OIYP Program, YOCIC will join a global network of young people working to make a difference. Over the next 3 years they will have opportunities to develop skills and knowledge, to meet other young people in the OIYP Network and to gain support for your work for social change, starting with an 8-day event in Sydney, Australia. Selected from over 3000 applications from over 100 countries, YOCIC was chosen for their experience, vision and commitment to working with others in their communities to address injustice.

We at Firelight are very proud of all of our grantee-partners' commitment and accomplishments. Join us in congratulating GCN & YOCIC!!!

Scourge of child sexual abuse takes toll on girls in sub-Saharan Africa

By Sharon LaFraniere, International Herald Tribune

<http://www.ihf.com/articles/2006/12/01/news/africa.php>

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SAMBAVA, Madagascar: Fifty kilometers outside this down-at-the-heels seaside town, Justin Betombo tends his vanilla plants and cheers the local soccer team as if he had not a care in the world. And in fact, what was once his greatest worry has been almost magically lifted from his shoulders.

In the prosecutor's office, a file filled with accusations that he had sodomized his 9-year-old niece has vanished.

Betombo was arrested in 2003 after the girl, Kenia, said he had savagely assaulted her. The police obtained his confession, which he later recanted, and a doctor's certificate that Kenia had been sexually violated, rendering her incontinent and anorexic. Twice they sent the case file to the local prosecutor, but Betombo walked away a free man.

Among sub-Saharan Africa's children, this is a distressingly common story. Even as this region races to adopt many of the developed world's norms for children, from universal education to limits on child labor, child sexual abuse remains stubbornly difficult to eradicate.

In much of the continent, child advocates say, perpetrators are shielded by the traditionally low status of girls, a view that sexual abuse should be dealt with privately and justice systems that constitute obstacle courses for victims.

Data are sparse and sexual violence is notoriously underreported. But **South African** police reports give an inkling of the sweep of child victimization.

In the 12 months that ended in March 2005, the police estimated that there were about 23,000 cases of child rape. In contrast, England and Wales, with nine million more people than South Africa, reported 13,300 rapes of all females in the most recent 12-month period.

The problem is by no means unique to Africa. While a survey of nine countries last year by the World Health Organization found the highest incidence of child sexual abuse in Namibia - more than one in five women there reported having been sexually abused before the age of 15 - it also found high rates in Peru, Japan and Brazil, among others.

Relatives are frequent perpetrators, as in much of the rest of the world. But African children face added risks, especially at school: Half of **Malawian** schoolgirls surveyed in 2006 said teachers or classmates had touched them in a sexual manner without their permission. Abuse cases are on the rise in **South Africa, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Uganda, Kenya** and other African countries, statistics show. Whether that means more children are being victimized or more are coming forward, or both, is impossible to determine, experts said.

Researchers cite various reasons why abuse is so common: poverty, which makes it harder for parents to keep children safe; a legacy of violent, oppressed societies; and cultural mores that allow offenders to escape criminal punishment, often by marrying their victims or compensating their families.

But, ultimately, said Rachel Jewkes, an expert on sexual violence with South Africa's Medical Research Council, the vast gap between the status of men and boys on one hand and women and girls on the other explains much of the climate of relative tolerance.

Increasingly, African nations are openly acknowledging the problem, partly because AIDS has made children more likely to fall ill or die from abuse. Campaigns against child sexual abuse are under way in **Zimbabwe, Lesotho**, Swaziland, Sierra Leone and elsewhere.

South Africa is perhaps furthest along in developing the specialized courts, medical treatment and counseling that have long been standard in the West. But even there, Jewkes said, appalling police work, like failure to verify the addresses of perpetrators and victims, routinely dooms prosecutions.

Beyond that, said Joan van Niekerk, head of Childline, which runs the nation's child-crisis hot lines, children regularly complain that coping with the criminal justice system is worse than the sexual abuse itself.

Kenia's father and mother are passionate about the need for justice for their daughter Kenia. But after four fruitless years, they said, they have all but given up hope.

Resource - Recognizing Child Abuse: What Caregivers Should Know

The first step in helping abused children is learning to recognize the symptoms of child abuse. Experienced service providers likely have seen all forms of child abuse at one time or another. They are alert to signs like these that may signal the presence of child abuse. The following resource from Prevent Child Abuse America can be a refresher for you to be alert to the signs of physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional maltreatment in the families you work with.

To read, see:

http://www.preventchildabuse.org/publications/parents/downloads/recognizing_abuse.pdf