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### Honour Thy Woman: The Church and Women Heroes - by Atuki Turner

Today is international women's day where we appreciate women's contribution to society, celebrate their victories and recognize the challenges still facing them.

This year I was pleased to see that the Church took a stand on domestic violence and preached against it in their sermons country wide. I was also relieved that maternal mortality is at last gaining recognition as a serious health issue, for many years it lagged behind as an women's issue, while great stride were being made towards women's empowerment.

The Church celebrates the lives of many women as heroines. Perpetua was a Roman princess who together with her slave girl Felicity, refused to worship the pagan gods when they became Christians. For this they were fed to the lions.

Today we honour them as saints. St Joan of Arc, led a crusade, a holy war against pagan states and was beheaded for this.

Who are the women we celebrate today?

I believe there are as many saints today as in the past who show courage and overcome tremendous challenges in their day to day lives, whilst serving others.

These women face violence in the homes, they cope with poverty, they suffer when sick especially during maternity.

Yet they face each new day with a brave face, determined that their children will have meal, that they will go to school and that they will receive medical attention. Walking through the streets and towns of Uganda you come across these women all the time. If these are today's unsung heroes, how can we celebrate their lives?

This brings me back to the Church's position on domestic violence, and another ordinary woman from the original first family of Joseph of Nazareth. A long time ago I heard a psychologist say that people often wonder how Jesus turned out the way he did. His answer was that it was because Jesus had a father, Joseph and a Mother Mary, who treated him as though he was the son of God. Today I want to take this analogy further by asking how did Mary turn out the way she did? My answer would be that she had a husband Joseph who treated her as though she was the Mother of God!

Imagine yourself as an ordinary Jua-

kali man on the streets receiving a call or text message from an unknown person telling you that your wife is with child, but not to worry because it is a child of the Holy Spirit. How would you react? If Joseph had reacted like many ordinary men, he would have beaten up and divorced Mary. Even worse in those days he could have publicly denounced and shamed her and had her stoned to death. This punishment still happens to women today especially under Sharia law. Instead Joseph decided to honour his woman. He protected her and welcomed the baby Jesus and that is why today we treat Mary as though she is the Mother of God.

If you consider the main teaching of the Bible, Thy shall love thy neighbour as you love yourself, it is one and same with the main Constitutional provisions that, All persons are equal before the law and that Women shall enjoy the same rights as men before and under the law. But how many of us men and women really believe in this simple concept of equality? And yet if we are to honour today's women of courage as heroes, we need many men to act like Joseph in their homes. If we believe our sons and daughters are children of God, then we should treat our women as Mothers of God.

## Is there a role for men in ending Violence Against Women- Patrick Ndira

There is a growing realization of the need for men to build partnerships with women to end violence against women. Indeed the role that men play as perpetrators is well documented as well as the need for men to change their behavior, but in spite of this, relatively little is known about any in the form of good examples of successful male involvement initiatives.

So I ask myself what should the value proposition and the initiative be for men to take positive action: for example what should be said to the man who very jealously defends his sister against her violent partner, but returns home only to viciously attack his wife; or the man in the street who pours all his scorn on the boss who fired him that morning by referring to that treatment as only deserved by a wife. He could say something like “my boss abused me as though I was his wife”. What about the man who says he doesn’t have to beat his wife since they are both adults but will willingly knock out the children because “they have to be disciplined”, or the chap who publicly rejects bride price only to turn to his boss to ask for an advance on his salary and a day off to attend a village bride price engagement. What about the man who simply dismisses gender based violence as “women’s issues with no place in a man’s world?”

The examples are numerous and the issues do get very paradoxical as the possible solutions are complex. One runs the risk of diluting the very ground breaking work already done by the women’s movement or even starting a misguided effort that will in-fact ultimately reinforce the inequality and violence, or one could have absolutely no impact, after all men are not the people primarily or immediately affected by the problem. But I say men are very directly identified with the problem and should be part of the solution too.

There are important reasons why we must all fight the vice of gender based violence. It is recognized globally as one of the greatest manifestations of women’s inequality and it leads to serious debilitation, injuries or even death, denying women a chance to enjoy their human rights, realize fulfilment or break free from poverty. It doesn’t stop there but goes on to hit the children very hard leaving them with torn or divided loyalties, loss of confidence and esteem and robs them of a childhood. It goes even further to encompass a huge dependence burden on men, since women are largely excluded from the wealth and power dynamics of society. In a sense it does not make good business sense at all to have this divide between men and women as it hits really hard on the pockets of men. For society, it translates into unbearable health, education and other social costs.

The poverty eradication agenda means nothing without the women who make up to half the Ugandan population at least. Poverty is not just about lacking money and other resources, it is known fundamentally to include powerlessness which gender based violence confers upon the women it visits. If they are lucky to live through it, they are likely to lose friendship networks, narrow their horizons, and think very little of themselves, thereby wiping away their potential for fulfillment and contribution to the economy.

A good starting point in involving whole society and men in particular in preventing Gender Based Violence (GBV) must be the principles that we all need to embrace and aspire to, the principles of freedom, equality and non discrimination and justice for all. And it is imperative that these principles have to be established and constantly renewed through activism and this is the mission for which women and men should forge partnerships, becoming civil society champions, helping cultivate the framework that corrects the imbalance between men and women.

The cornerstone for change towards a more just and equal world will have to be the fraternity of activist men and women organizing initiatives at local levels to promote the right consciousness and initiating individual and collective actions to apply the principles above to address the basic problems in society as they manifest.

There is a strong motivation to take responsible action at individual and collective level to transform the culture and environment that perpetuates violence against women.

## >>>A QUIZ FOR REAL MEN<<<

Today is International Women’s day when we celebrate the unique contribution made by women to society and the great strides achieved by women in their march towards equality and empowerment. Here is a short quiz to get you to examine your conscience about your understanding of women’s equality and empowerment.

- 1a) You believe that women who wear mini-skirts and get raped were “asking for it”.  
b) You do not believe men should use the excuse of women dressing badly to rape them.  
c) Don’t know
- 2a) You believe prostitution exists because of women  
b) You believe men are as guilty as the women because it takes two to tango  
c) Don’t know
3. Your friends tease you because your wife wears the trousers in the home? Do you:  
a) Go home and confront your wife for trying to usurp your authority  
b) Laugh it off with humour saying, “ My wife is so powerful that if she was to turn her power into electricity UMEME would be out of business.”  
c) Don’t know
- 4a) Publicly you denounce violence against women but privately you think there are times when beating a woman is justified.  
b) You know that there is never an excuse for using violence to resolve a conflict.  
c) Don’t know
5. There are screams from next door late in the night and you know your civil servant neighbour is beating his wife again:  
a) You close your door, shut your windows and ears because it is none of your business?  
b) You jump out of bed and go knock on their door demanding to know what’s up because it is your business?  
c) Don’t know
- 6a) You take the term “Head of the Family” literally to mean you are always right and must not be questioned by your wife.  
b) You take the term “Head of the home” as a figure of speech knowing that you and your wife are in an equal partnership where each nurtures the other to realize their full potential.  
c) Don’t know.
- 7a) You never ever apologise to your wife because it is a sign of weakness.  
b) You have the courage to say I am sorry.  
c) Don’t know.
8. You had a dinner party and your wife did a marvelous job and the guests have gone:  
a) You notice that she is tired but assume she will wash the duties anyway.  
b) Bravely insist on washing the dishes.  
c) Don’t know
9. The house girl is off and your wife has malaria:  
a) You assume being super woman she will still wash the clothes, make the dinner and clean the house somehow.  
b) Take the day off work to help in the house.  
c) Don’t know.
- 10a) The debate on bride price on air – you call in saying:  
b) You believe culture should be defended at all cost. You believe culture should not be used as an excuse to oppress women.  
c) Don’t know

If you have answered mostly (a’s), you have a long way to go to embrace women as partners in development. If you answer mostly (b’s), you are already a gender sensitive man who is promoting women as partners in development, and if you don’t know, it’s never too late, why not start by washing the dishes today?

## MIFUMI GIVES HOPE TO BRIGHT CHILDREN

by Mary Wafuoyoo, Childrens Officer



Pupils of Mifumi Primary School

Like most children who have put up a brilliant performance, Alfred and Ruth were expected to jump up and down to celebrate when the primary leaving examinations were announced however this was not to happen as their future hung in the balance.

Alfred Ochieng was the best student at Sesera girls with 5 aggregates. This meant he got the best grade in all but one subjects. He was also the second best in the entire Tororo district. A total orphan he had no hopes of going to a good secondary school. He lost his father in 2001 and immediately after the father's death, his mother was frustrated by the relatives and she left for their home in Mbarara where she also passed on. He was left in the hands of a stepmother who also passed away in 2005 leaving him in the hands of an aunt who is already burdened by the responsibility of her own six children.

Ruth Akello on the other hand was not any different from Alfred. She lost both her parents and lives with a sister who is equally helpless. She went to a Universal Primary Education (UPE) school and was scratching living selling firewood to residents of Naluwerere trading centre in order to meet her scholastic needs. She had given up hope of joining secondary education despite her brilliant performance. She was the best student in Mudakori primary school in the Primary Leaving Examinations (PLE).

Then just when their hope was fading MIFUMI offered a glimmer of hope. An advert by MIFUMI calling upon students who had exhibited brilliant performances in the 2010 PLE to apply for a scholarship was put up around the district. MIFUMI supports two bright but needy children around the district yearly and among the many that applied Ruth and Alfred turned up to be the most deserving students when further investigations were made.

Ruth was admitted at Tororo Girls School while Alfred was taken by St. Peter's College Tororo. The two will be supported by MIFUMI.

Today the drums are up again and the two brilliant students can start to celebrate their success.

MIFUMI was inundated with deserving applicants like Ruth and Alfred. If you feel you would be in a position to help these needy young people, then please do get in touch.

## A HAVEN FOR DOMESTIC VIOLENCE SURVIVORS BY IMMACULATE NYAMWENGE HAVEN MANAGER

On 12<sup>th</sup> December 2008, MIFUMI launched the first ever purpose built Haven for survivors of domestic violence. This refuge serves as an emergency shelter for women and children whose lives are at risk and as the first phase of MIFUMI's resettlement into a violence free programme.

The Haven was opened at a time when cases of repeated violence were on the rise. To date the haven has sheltered 323 women and children in urgent need, many of whom have been resettled back in their communities and for those who were unable to return to their communities, MIFUMI resettled them at a nearby MIFUMI's second phase resettlement. Previously, the organization had to book survivors into hotels and occasionally, staff had to go out of their way to accommodate the survivors.

One example is that of a woman who was accused by her husband of killing their child. She had separated with him because of domestic violence and she carried the children along with her. When the child fell sick and died, the man attacked and strangled her accusing her of killing the child. People came to her rescue and that's how she survived death. However the man promised to kill her any time he meets her. She ran to the MIFUMI Advice Centre where she was referred to the MIFUMI Head office. Given the fact that her husband had promised to kill her, her life was at risk. She was scared so we decided to temporarily resettle her at the Haven as we went ahead to pursue the case of assault against the husband.

The Haven has a number of staff members. The Haven manager and resettlement officer are in charge of management and resettlement of the residents whose lives are out of risk. The Independent Domestic Violence Adviser (IDVA) receives the survivors, registers them, opens up files for them, listens to their story and counsels them. She also follows up their cases with police and other Advice centres. The nurse is in charge of the medical care of the residents. She checks the new comers whose health is not in good state and also ensures that the residents who are sick get medical help. The matron takes care of the residents, she ensures that they feed, drink, bathe, sleep well and takes care of any other things that fall there under. The staff work as a team in ensuring that the residents have access to what they need.

The Haven has policies and guidelines which are strictly followed. These are meant to ease management and ensure that the residents co-exist. In order for someone to qualify to enter the Haven, the person should be suffering domestic violence and her life should be at risk.

The women and children accepted in the Haven should be those referred to from the different MIFUMI Advice Centres located at the sub counties of Tororo. However, in cases where a survivor runs to the gates of the Haven when her life is at stake she can be allowed in and the referral process is done later.

Every survivor is expected to present a referral letter to the guard at the gate of the Haven save for those who run for rescue and need immediate help. The guard will then present a referral letter to the reception. The survivor is then checked thoroughly by the Haven assistant in charge and the property brought along is recorded. The survivor will then be registered and a file opened for them. They then proceed to the counseling room for counseling and the nurse will check any survivor who is not in good health. The survivors are expected to report to the Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA) who will pass them through the rules and regulations governing the Haven. If the survivor agrees to the terms and conditions then they can qualify to be admitted into the Haven.

The Haven is out of bounds for men. This is meant to completely remove the women from an environment where they will be reminded about what they went through while under the mercy of men.

There are a number of co-curricular activities at the Haven. The children play a number of games such as chess and scrabble. There is a teacher who comes everyday to teach them how to read, write and other things. This helps them to develop their skills and talents.

The maximum period for one to stay at the Haven is one month. Any period beyond that has to be with approval from the authorities and beyond three months is considered unusual.

There are exit procedures to be followed, first the survivor's case should be assessed and her safety guaranteed while out of the Haven. The survivor is counseled by the IDVA and she signs a form showing that she has left the Haven. She is then taken back to her community by the resettlement officer who ensures that the community is counseled and the survivor is accepted back.

Being manager of the Haven has many challenges but the job is interesting and worthwhile as I know that my work helps many women and children in desperate need. We hope that we can continue to offer these badly needed services as we receive no financial support from the state.

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