

Reports on Activity of AFJNN in Enugu State.

Issues of social Justice is a matter of global dimension and of deep interest to the Church as portrayed by the writings of Pope Paul VI in his encyclical titled *Populorum Progressio*. At the base of the issues of Social Justice are matters of Human Rights. Domestic Violence against women and children an issue of human right, has over the years stood out as a matter of grave concern globally and which unfortunately is made worse in some developing countries by certain unhealthy customs, religion and some cultural practices.

The United Nations defines violence against women as "any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual, or mental harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

In simple terms, domestic violence is a harsh and abusive treatment of a person in the home. Naturally, a home should be a place of rest and welcome, a safe haven for an individual. It is supposed to be a place or space where one can let down all guards and still feel secure. Home should be a place of relaxation and satisfying interactions. A home is a place where one knows they are loved and feels accepted irrespective of external circumstances.

But domestic violence breaks all of the above meaning of a home and renders it a place of most deep hurt and trauma. Brokenness and pains are some of the after-effects of domestic violence.

The World Health Organization (WHO) estimated that about 35% of women worldwide have experience some form of domestic violence in their lifetime. It also pointed out exposure to domestic violence as a child as well as low education among the possible pre-disposing factors to domestic violence in the perpetrators. Therefore creating awareness on the matters of domestic violence and advocacy for the rights of women and children is key to decreasing the incidence of violence at the home-front in the society.

Africa Faith and Justice Network Nigeria (AFJNN), a faith-based community of advocates for responsible U.S. relations with Africa, with the mission of peace-building and promotion of human rights facilitated women Empowerment Workshop on Advocacy awareness seminar on Domestic Violence against Women and Children in Enugu state. The workshop and seminar which held from 28th -31st January 2019 ended with a courtesy visit to different parastatals with the power to influence and better the lot of women and children in the State. Attending the workshop were over a hundred persons. There were Women Religious from different Religious Congregations working in the State and beyond. A few men also attended. In attendance were also women from different Faith-Base Organizations and NGOs like the WACOL, JDPC Enugu diocese, JDPC/OEP, and some members of the Youth Group. The main facilitators of the programme were Rev. Fr. Aniedi Okure (O.P) Phd, Rev. Sr. Bene Okure PhD, Rev. Sr. Eucharica Madueke (SNDdeN) PhD and anchor persons from the different Religious Congregations.

Empowered by the knowledge from the workshop and seminar, the group on the 31st of January, 2019, embarked on advocacy visit to the offices of the Attorney General of the State, the Commissioner for Gender affairs, The Chief Inspector of Police and finally the office of the Governor of the State. At the end, a new AFJNN executive was inaugurated in Enugu State to ensure continuity of the voice of AFJNN in the State on matters of Human Rights.

Motivated by the empowerment received from the AFJNN workshop and seminar in Enugu State, a step-down of the Awareness Seminar on Domestic Violence against Women and Children was taken further to Anambra State. On the 3rd July, 2019, The Justice Development and Peace/Caritas Onitsha Ecclesiastical Province conducted a step-down of that seminar in St. Mary's Catholic Church, Iba Pope Awada. The seminar which was facilitated by Rev. Sr. Mary-Ann Ijeoma Okoye (SNDdeN) and Mrs. Anastesia Okoye(C.W.O member), had over seventy participants comprising of youth, women and children and the men folk of the Parish. Enthused by the awareness created against domestic violence and new knowledge gained in the seminar, the men and women folks in attendance who were couples held a special reconciliation and renewal session at the end of the seminar while expressing the desire for more of such seminars in the future.

The scourge of the coronavirus pandemic and the global lockdown with its consequence economic hardship, have seen incidences of domestic violence in the increase. Many victims of domestic violence have found neither escape route nor respite from their violators during this period of confinement engendered by the global lockdown. The inability to leave home, the shutdown of possible avenues for social let-off, the business and financial deprivations couple with hunger and frustration seem to have combined to make the already existing bad situation of domestic violence in the society even worse world over. In the recent times, there was a case reported of a ten year old girl who was badly battered by her guardian in Enugu State. Thanks to social media which helped to spread the news of the predicament of the child who was hospitalized and on the 5th of July was granted scholarship and financial support by the State Governor.

Although AFJNN Enugu Chapter was not directly involved in the case of the battered child, however the disturbing incidence has led to AFJNN has making great effort and taking the initiative to create a forum to continue awareness creation on the issues of domestic violence against women and children and to call on the conscience of the perpetrators and the society at large for a positive change. Consequently, on the 16th of July, 2020, AFJNN Enugu Chapter carried out a radio program on the topic. The program which was anchored by Uche Eze of the Coal City Fm feature Barr. Amaka Ilodigwe, Rev. Sr. Mary-Ann Ijeoma Okoye (SNDdeN) and Ms Chukwudi Eziunor as the presenters. The program lasted for 30 minutes and had persons from different parts of the Eastern region beyond Enugu State, calling in for questions, clarifications and more interactions.

It is hoped that as the lockdown begins to gradually re-open and as people begin to adapt to the new normal, AFJNN Enugu Chapter would work more in partnership with other FBOs, CBOs and NGOs to form a formidable network which will have far reaching impacts on the issues of human rights and social justice in the State and beyond.