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[Tanzania Daily News \(Dar es Salaam\)](#)**Tanzania: Battered Women Find Safety in House of Peace**

Ichikaeli Maro

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Dar Es Salaam — ASHURA Iddi (25) is a mother of one and pregnant for her second child. Her colleague Alice Mlatu is a mother to two boys, 11 and four years, respectively. Both are survivors of abusive relationship and accommodated at the House of Peace in Dar es Salaam.

Ashura and Alice are among the 33 women and 17 children who live in the house in an anonymous location in Dar es Salaam. The House of Peace is an initiative established in 2002 to provide temporary shelter for women and children who are victims of gender based violence.

Ashura and her colleagues, although victims of violence, continue to be hosted at the house to gain some strength that will allow them to feel dignified again. Narrating how she went to the house, Ashura says: "My husband and I got married in 2003. We got one child within one year of our marriage and because we agreed to observe child spacing I had to go for family planning. "In 2009 my husband changed, he started staying out late...sometimes up to 2am and started beating me and blaming me for not conceiving and threatened to marry another woman.

I had to leave the contraceptives and within three months I was pregnant. But even then he insisted he could no longer live with me, he was planning to marry another woman. "He continued to come home late, beat me up and chase me out of our bedroom with my child. One day he woke up at 9am, found me on the corridor and insisted I must leave the house otherwise he would kill me.

He took his motorbike and left. He came back at 12 noon and asked why I was still in his house...he beat me until neighbours came to my rescue. Ashura says she was seriously hurt and that her husband took her to hospital where, however, she was refused treatment pending presentation of a PF 3.

"He took me back home and left me there. At around 6pm he called asking if I could walk and meet him at a place called Madoeko. On arrival I found him with a woman whom he said was the one who deserved to be with him and not me," she says. But that was not all.

The poor woman received another beating from her husband in front of the other woman and other passersby. "He beat me till I became unconscious.

Good Samaritans took me to Amana hospital where I was admitted. He never came to see me for all the time I was at the hospital. When I was discharged, I decided to go back to my matrimonial home and called to inform him but he came and chased me out of the house with my child," she says.

Ashura who hails from Lindi, says her family members advised her to leave the house or else she would get killed. She, however, says she did not have any money to go back to her home in Lindi. She left her matrimonial home, though and started to roam around the streets with her child. She says life was tough especially at night because she did not have a place to sleep. Some of her friends would invite her, but still it was difficult for her. Her child caught a cold and was coughing extensively.

"I thought of committing suicide because all what I had after selling my wedding ring so that my child could eat was finished. I was directed to offices of the Tanzania Women Lawyers Association (TAWLA) to present my case. TAWLA asked me if I knew the House of Peace situated at an anonymous place at Msasani. I was directed to the place and given bus fare.

"Staff at the House of Peace received us and have been supporting me and my child with all the basic necessities. I am at peace planning for my next step in life," she says. It is such horrible incidents that pushed the United Nations Fund for Population Activities (UNFPA), United Nations Fund for Women (UNIFEM), US Embassy in Tanzania and several public and private enterprises to organise and launch a special campaign titled: "Don't kick her, kick the ball" to advocate for non-violent relationships and support activities of the House of Peace.

The campaign coincides with the first football World Cup in Africa. The campaign uses footballs with the "Don't kick her, kick the ball" slogan to advocate for free-violent relationships. The footballs will be sold at Protea Hotels and Shoppers supermarkets and profits from the sales will be channelled to the House of Peace. The House of Peace is the only crisis centre for women in Dar es Salaam. It provides shelter, legal and health care, food and clothing to women and children survivors of gender-based violence.

Clients to the centre are brought by organisations dealing with human rights advocacy groups and institutions such as TAWLA, Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA), the police as well as Amana hospital and Muhimbili National Hospital. At the house women and their children are given three-month shelter after which she must be in a position for alternative

means to cope with life.

"But the state under which these women come, we find it difficult to let them go within that time. Some are severely bartered, we have to treat them, provide counselling and means to start new life," says a social worker at the house. Other parties in the campaign, launched by the Minister for Community Development, Gender and Children, Mrs Margaret Sitta, are Coroina Society and Dar es Salaam-based Diplomats' spouses.

Prevailing gender norms show that sexual violence such as rape in intimate relationships are still considered culturally-acceptable by both men and women. Dr Julitta Onabanjo, UNFPA Country Representative, urges the government to mobilise and sustain resources and provide a safe environment where women's rights are respected and where they can live without fear of being violated or abused.

She says the objective of the initiative is to show the world where has Africa come from, who are the people of Africa and what are they doing. "A lot has been done...at the same time poverty across the continent still has female face-girls and women keep dying while giving birth, women still lag behind in education. Many dream of Africa where they can live freely, with dignity and respect."

She says it is women like Ashura and her colleagues that inspired UNFPA and partners to organise the initiative. The event was also attended by the US Ambassador to Tanzania, Mr Alfonso Lenhardt and his wife Jacqueline. "Ashura has courage to raise her voice to talk about what is the reality for many women in Tanzania," she said. According to her, in Dar es Salaam alone almost half of women who have been in a relationship have experienced physical or sexual violence at the hands of a partner.

"Inequality and injustice are still part of everyday life for women particularly in the rural areas and this must stop," she says, adding there is no noble cause than to stop all forms of violence against women and children. She praises President Jakaya Kikwete for the launch in 2008 of a "Say no to violence against women" campaign led by UNIFEM.

President Kikwete was the second African Head of State after President Abdoulaye Wade of Senegal to sign on the UNIFEM campaign. Mr Kikwete also promised the government's commitment to end violence against women, review laws and take necessary measures to make it happen.

Mrs Sitta could not hold her emotion as she heard Ashura's ordeal, saying, "There are so many women in Tanzania suffering the same way -- they are still bartered and some are killed. She said, wondering: "How many men are suffering the same as women? Why are women bartered? Vividly disturbed, the minister told the gathering that even educated men in the country barter their wives.

To her, so many women in Tanzania are suffering but stick to abusive relationships because they are poor. She said the only solution to women's suffering was to empower them economically. The ministry, in collaboration with development Partners, has been conducting violence against women campaigns in the Lake Zone where it is widely believed that "a woman will never feel loved by her husband until she is bartered." About 700 million US dollars have been set aside for the campaign against such cultural practices which the minister rubbishes.

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