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IWPR project team produces three-part radio series to highlight issue of sexual violence in Darfur.

IWPR has produced a three-part series on sexual violence in Darfur for the radio programme *Fi al Mizan* (On the Scale), in cooperation with Radio Dabanga, which broadcasts to over one million listeners in Sudan and eastern Chad.

Fi al Mizan is broadcast every Wednesday in Sudanese Arabic as well as Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit, three of the main local Darfur languages.

The *Fi al Mizan* team, including Radio Dabanga editor Tajeldin Abdhalla Adam, Darfuri lawyer Assadig Musa and IWPR reporter Katy Glassborow, decided the series was necessary because of the information gap for women affected by rape in Darfur.

Issues surrounding rape in Darfur are highly sensitive, and women who talk openly about their ordeals risk being shunned.

One woman, talking to Musa about her experience of being raped when she left a camp in Zalingi to gather firewood, said, "If you speak about it, you get a problem inside society. Girls aren't dealt with very kindly. No-one can understand that it is not the girl's fault."

Another victim we spoke to said she became very frightened that her family would find out that she had been raped and made pregnant. She left a displacement camp to give birth in a remote area of bush land, before abandoning the baby.

A group of people found the child and tracked down the mother. While she has now accepted it, she is suffering from psychological scars and is receiving little support.

"When I was pregnant I was not eating, and in a very bad psychological condition. I was very isolated and people described me as a mad girl and I didn't have a social life. I had difficulty getting used to [my pregnancy] because the father was a [member of the] janjaweed [militia]," she said.

The *Fi al Mizan* team decided to make a series of programmes explaining very simply what sexual violence is; the fact that rape is a crime; and how women in Darfur have been affected.

The series launched with a woman's frank testimony of her rape; and staff from NGOs talking about the need for medical and psychosocial support for victims at the community level.

The second show covered issues of how international law views rape and crimes of sexual violence. Lawyers Wanda Akin and Raymond Brown, representing Darfur victims at the International Criminal Court, ICC, explained that sexual violence is sometimes used as a tool of war, but that this is prohibited by international law.

In the last programme of the series, Darfuri lawyers talked about problems they encounter when they try to represent rape victims in local courts.

Lawyer Rasha Saraj from El Fasher explained that Sudanese law lacks a proper definition of rape, so cases are handled in a similar way to adultery or sodomy charges. This means that women need four male witnesses to verify that rape took place, and was not adultery.

Lawyer Mohammed Salim added that the standard of proof required for a conviction means that 99 per cent of rape cases are thrown out of local courts.

“There is the case of a victim who has been raped, with a medical report showing there are associated injuries in her vagina,” he said. “But this kind of medical evidence cannot be considered in Sudanese courts. This is rejected and the court says it cannot prove that the woman was raped.”

Fathi Khalil, the head of the Sudan Bar Association and a ruling National Congress Party loyalist, defended Sudan’s laws and said amendments being called for by lawyers were not necessary.

Musa said that, as a lawyer, the radio series had been challenging to make because of the profound impact of rape on its victims, in terms of both its psychological and social consequences.

“A major challenge in the production of the series has been getting victims of rape to speak about what has happened to them - something which has proved very painful for them to discuss and, as a delicate issue, required highly sensitive reporting,” Musa said.

According to Musa, the aim of the programme was to shed light on the weaknesses in Sudanese law dealing with rape while also highlighting the lack of support for its victims and the need to inform them of their rights.

“It is not enough to fight against rape just in terms of the law and its ability to combat it but it is also vital to help the victims themselves and provide the necessary medical treatment. What is happening in Darfur demands a response at the local, national and international level in order to combat high incidences of rape and to deal with its consequences,” he said.

Adam added that rape and sexual violence in Darfur is a highly important issue for the victims.

“A few days after we aired the first show, we got a number of phone calls from listeners asking for more coverage and reporting,” Adam said. “In one case a women from North Darfur asked us to report her case saying she has been waiting many years since she was raped in 2004 to find someone who could help her with her legal right as a victim.

“She says victims don't know how and where to turn for help but this programme offers them a chance and opportunity to seek their rights.”

Radio Dabanga is a radio station run by Darfuri journalists in The Netherlands. They have an extensive network of on-the-ground contacts and reporters, and are a key source of information for millions of internally displaced people and refugees.

Fi al Mizan is broadcast every Wednesday in Sudanese Arabic as well as Fur, Zaghawa and Masalit, three of the main local Darfur languages.

So far, topics for Fi al Mizan have included the misuse of security laws in Darfur; demonstrations staged by opposition politicians in Khartoum for laws to be reformed; the African Union’s views on justice solutions for Darfur; and the possibility of displaced Darfuris, who have spent years in camp, returning to their home villages.

To listen to the programmes, visit <http://iwpr.net/programme/scale-darfur> or <http://radiodabanga.org/>.

Location: Darfur

Topic: Women

Focus: ICC - International Criminal Court

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