



INTERNATIONAL JUSTICE MISSION®

PO Box 58147
Washington, DC 20037-8147
www.ijm.org

Phone: 703.465.5495
Fax: 703.465.5499

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For more information or to book an interview contact:
703.465.5495 • news@ijm.org

PRESIDENT BUSH ANNOUNCES INITIATIVE TO PROTECT AFRICAN WOMEN AND GIRLS FROM SEXUAL VIOLENCE AS PRIORITY FOR G-8 CALLING FOR \$55 MILLION FROM US CONGRESS FOR INITIATIVE FOR WOMEN'S JUSTICE

International Justice Mission calls for support of African advocates to bring perpetrators of sexual violence to justice and defend vulnerable victims

WASHINGTON, DC June 30, 2005 - President Bush said today that addressing sexual violence against women and girls in Africa as one of his priorities for the G-8 Summit, saying he will ask Congress to “provide \$55 million over three years to promote women's justice and empowerment in four African nations, nations that can stand as examples of reform for others. I'll urge other G8 nations to join us in protecting the lives and the rights of women in Africa.”

IJM Founder and President, Gary Haugen, said we need to stand with and empower African advocates working on behalf of women and girls in the path of sexual violence. Haugen described the combination of wide-spread sexual violence and AIDS as the “perfect storm” saying, “Combating the prevalence of rape and sexual assault is perhaps the greatest opportunity for leveraged impact on the prevalence of HIV/AIDS transmission.” Haugen further explained the role of public justice and the rule of law in combating this problem by saying, “Sexual violence can exist on a large scale only where the rule of law outlawing such violence is not properly enforced due to inefficient law enforcement resources or capacity.”

President Bush said, “Another important aspect of empowerment and the fight against AIDS is the legal protection of women and girls against sexual violence and abuse.”

IJM's Director of Operations for Africa, Reagan Demas, says that in the discussion of HIV/AIDS prevention, the plight of the victim of sexual crime is seldom discussed. “Victims of rape don't have a choice in the prevention of AIDS. They are lethally injected with the disease by their rapist.” IJM has a strategy to combat sexual violence on the continent of Africa including “...bringing individual perpetrators, especially high-profile abusers to justice; removing victims from sexually abusive situations; building the capacity of justice systems to recognize, investigate and prosecute instances of sexual violence; and educate the public on the problem” said Demas.

IJM's investigators and lawyers in Africa defend women and girls, many of them AIDS orphans and widows, who are victims of rape and sexual violence. Recently, IJM lawyers in Kenya successfully defended a four year old girl, Martha* who was raped by a neighbor.

Police arrested the rapist whose friends then threatened to kill Martha's father and tried to pressure the police to release the rapist. He was released and later went to Martha's home and threatened to shoot her father if they pursued the case. IJM lawyers took her case and after months of frustrating witness intimidation and delays by the defense, justice was served when Martha's rapist was convicted and sent to prison.

IJM's African staff work in Zambia, Uganda and Kenya. Haugen said that an initiative to combat sexual violence represents "the right diagnosis and the right treatment to help Africa turn back the AIDS epidemic." The initiative "gives a critical voice to the new consciousness that violence is a major engine of the AIDS epidemic, and focuses on making the public justice system actually work to protect women and girls from sexual violence."

Haugen added that "it's critical for the U.S. and other G-8 nations to provide support to African lawyers and law enforcement professionals who are leading efforts to build the capacity of African justice systems and bring rescue to victims and accountability to perpetrators. "Sexual violence is against the law and strengthening the application of the law as well as training and supporting justice professionals should be a high priority."

About International Justice Mission

International Justice Mission is a human rights organization that rescues victims of violence, sexual exploitation, slavery and oppression. A multi-national team of law enforcement professionals and a highly qualified legal staff conduct criminal investigations and collect evidence to rescue victims and bring perpetrators to justice. IJM was founded by Gary Haugen who was the Officer in Charge of the U.N. investigation into the Rwandan genocide.

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