

THE SPEECH ON 1ST DECEMBER 2022 BY MAMA JANEPHER KODIA (MU PRESIDENT, BONDO DIOCESE) DURING THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH SERVICE OF 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM AGAINST GENDER BASED VIOLENCE (GBV) AT ST. MICHAEL AND ALL ANGELS CATHEDRAL, BONDO, KENYA

The Diocesan Bishop and Patron of the Mothers' Union, Bondo Diocese, the Rt.Rev.Prof.David Kodia, Bishop Emily, Sub-County Commissioner, Vicar General and Dean of the Cathedral , the Ven Canon George Omil, the Rev.Dominic Misolo, the Director of IFAGE, the entire Diocesan MU leadership under our able Chairlady, Lay Canon Margaret Otieno plus our Hon. MU Coordinator, Ven. Can Ruth Odongo, KAMA, KAYO, our campaign partners from the County and the medical fraternity, MU members giving form to the congregation, esteemed guests and all protocols observed, I greet you all in the name of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, Praise the Lord! Jesus Christ is Lord over my life. WELCOME!

Today is a very important day in our Diocese as it marks the official launch of this year's activism against GBV. As we stand against GBV in our Diocese and beyond, it is crucial to remember that Gender-based violence is a human rights violation. It is an unrelenting assault on human dignity, depriving people of their human rights. We take cognizance of the fact that freedom from violence is a fundamental human right, and GBV undermines a person's sense of self-worth and self-esteem. During the United Nations' 16 Days of Activism against GBV (25 Nov – 10 Dec), Mothers' Union joins with thousands of other organizations throughout the world to raise awareness of and campaign against GBV as this is one of the most widespread violations of human rights. It can affect any person at any time; it takes place in many forms; it spans many societies. It can be part of a culture's social norms; it can be hidden behind closed doors. We may have witnessed it and ignored, we may have sided with the perpetrators and failed to protect the victims, or we may have gotten used to it as the order of the day. It is WRONG period!

GBV, not only affects physical health, but also mental health and may lead to self-harm, isolation, depression and suicidal attempts. GBV works against our MU objectives and the overall Christian concern for families worldwide. Back here in our Diocese, how many girls have been given out to early and forced marriages, how many have been raped by non-strangers, how many widows have been denied their rightful inheritance, how many men, boys and elderly have been victims?... the list goes on and on. It is in this Diocese, for instance, where a widow had her house mysteriously burnt down due to her refusal to be inherited and the MU Bondo had to come to her rescue and reconstructed the house for her, we have seen brothers sharing portions of their parent's land and sidelining their female siblings, we have seen men adding second, third and even fourth wives

because the first wife failed to sire a son... and many other cases we have attended to. We speak for the voiceless - GBV statistics in this region are very disheartening, we cannot keep silent.

The Mothers' Union theme for this year 2022 has been , **Wholesome life for women and their ministry** extracted from **John 10:10b**, and in line with the joint campaign theme of demystifying challenges faced by faith communities in addressing reproductive health issues and power relations, I wish to urge all of us to be vigilant in scanning our environment and not to hesitate to speak out against any form of GBV however trivial, we are the voice of the Voiceless. Last year, the Mothers Union Kenya, partnered with Mary Sumner House to support the Mental Health and Wellness program, and this was in response to the alarming GBV suicides and killings cases that heightened during the period of the Covid-19 pandemic. To this end, a training of its kind was held for all the MU Coordinators nationally and they came out as "Mental Health Facilitators", and our very own, the Rev.Capt. Dorothy, was one of them, though now out of the Country but fully with us spiritually. We are in the process of empowering her successor in this regard to train our Mental Health Care givers from our vast membership. Our MU Worldwide campaign slogan is **#No more 1 in 3!** – we want to see a serious statistical decline of GBV victims to zero - GBV has to stop, and we are the change agents that God has anointed at such a time as this. So, lets take the mantle, no relenting! The perpetrators of GBV must not see peace until they stop the violence! The Bible exhorts us to give up our violence and oppression and do what is just and right (Ezekiel 45:9).

It is our prayer that the impact of the 16 days campaign in our Diocese and communities across the world, and our message, will help shine a light into the GBV darkness. And where there is light, darkness cannot stand. To the Mothers' Union, Bondo Diocese (The Blue Army of the Lord), and like-minded brethren, keep up the fight, do not relent. It is a fight we must win, and it is a continuous process. For now, during this window of 16 days, we must make impact, we have done it in the past, let's do it again and our prayer partners are with us in this. We are in touch with the Worldwide MU President, Sharan Harper and she has wished us successful anti GBV 2022 campaigns. The MU leadership and members of our partner Dioceses all over the world are with us in the wave of prayers including but not limited to MU Diocese of Sheffield in the UK, Diocese of Guyana in South America, Diocese of Swansea & Brecon, UK, Diocese of Argentina, Diocese of Free State, South Africa, Diocese of Offa & Ogba, Nigeria, and MU Diocese of Uruguay). Like Esther, let us take up the mantle and speak out against GBV, secure freedom for people and restore the sanctity of life for all. If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews may come from another place, but you and your generation will perish...and who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this (Esther 4:14). Brethren, **arise and speak out against GBV** in our society, the time for action is now! May the Lord bless you and renew your strength in Jesus' name, Amen.