

Zanzibar grapples to protect children from sex tourism

By **Apolinari Tairo - eTN Tanzania** - September 27, 2017



Tourists on a Zanzibar beach.

The United Nations Children Fund is working with the Zanzibar government to eliminate child abuse on the rich tourist island of Tanzania on the Indian Ocean coast.

Rich in beach tourism, Zanzibar has been rated among African destinations haunted by “sexcapades” from Europe, Africa, and Southeast Asia. The island had in recent years reported an increase in child abuse not just in tourism but in different forms, from family to institutional levels.

Tourist hotels are mentioned among institutions known for gearing sexual and child abuse in the island.

The Zanzibar government is now looking for financial and technical support from United Nations agencies and other donors to help the island fight gender-based and child abuse violence rampant on the island.

Zanzibar Minister for Labor, Women and Children, Maudline Castico, recently launched a five-year National Action Plan looking to end abuse of children and women on the island.

Through support from UN agencies, the Zanzibar government is looking to implement a five-year plan aimed to protect children on the island and Castico said his semi-autonomous government will ensure that women and children are highly protected from gender and child violence. The program will cost about a US\$20 million.

The UN agencies had raised a concern over rampant child abuse where it affects two out of three children born on the island. The UN report says that 6 out of 10 boys and 7 out of 10 girls had experienced violence through different forms on the island.

The UN says that child abuse in Zanzibar has been connected with abuse and violence against women where one out of nine women have been sexually abused.

Zanzibar President Dr. Ali Mohammed Shein said through a statement that his government will work out to end violence against children and women by imposing laws and legislations leading to tough punishment against violence perpetrators.

“Violence is a daily reality for significant numbers of women and children in Zanzibar. The immediate and long-term social, health, and economic consequences of violence against women and children represent a key challenge to national development,” Dr. Shein said in the statement.

The United Nations Children Fund (UNICEF) representative in Tanzania, Ms. Manisa Zaman, said a culture of silence in Zanzibar has been a cause for child abuse where parents kept silent when their children fell victims to torture and physical assaults.

The United Nations World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) had underlined a Global Code of Ethics for Tourism, aimed to end exploitation of human beings in any form, especially when applied to children.

“We cannot build the responsible and sustainable tourism sector that we seek without protecting the most vulnerable in our societies. To do so we need effective tools and a global commitment,” said UNWTO Secretary General, Dr. Taleb Rifai, in July during a meeting which discussed tourism ethics.

“Sexual exploitation in travel and tourism has a child’s face. No country is untouched by this phenomenon, and no child is immune,” Dr. Rifai said.

The fight against child exploitation in tourism is one of the priorities of UNWTO which has been leading the World Tourism Network on Child Protection for the past 20 years.

UNWTO said that the rise of the Internet and informal operators, as well as greater access to international travel, have expanded “demand” and heightened the dangers for children. At the same time, grinding poverty and lack of education combined with the continued neglect of child protection systems, all have fueled child abuse.

In the context of the universal 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), the International Year aims to support a change in policies, business practices, and consumer behavior towards a more sustainable tourism sector that can contribute to all the 17 SDGs.

Zanzibar is a popular sex tourism destination for European tourists, attracting girls from poor families to engage themselves in the sex business. The semi-autonomous island has been dominated by sex workers operating under top secrecy.

The island depends on tourism as its main economic artery, banking on its pristine beaches.

In his message to mark the 2017 World Tourism Day, Dr. Rifai said, “Whenever you travel, wherever you travel, remember to respect nature, respect culture, and respect your host.”

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2



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