

## **SWWS: TACKLING RAPE NEEDS CONCERTED ACTION NOW!**

SWWS is saddened but not surprised that more rapes on vulnerable Penan women has been reported. Since this hit the headlines back in 2008, SWWS has been conducting its *Empowering Rural Girls (ERG) Project* in the Baram to raise awareness and to develop systems of help. The recommendations from this project have been submitted to the Ministry of Women, Family and Community Development who had funded the project. We also note that they had liaised with the State Government to form an inter-agency committee for Penan women development. It is now high time for all these parties to come together and formulate comprehensive and integrated strategies and plan to tackle what is happening in the interior.

Three of the 8 recommendations are particularly pertinent to the latest case of rape. These are:

- The government states clearly to all major companies in the interior that they are expected to comply with the sexual harassment code for employees in the work place and surrounding communities and as part of their corporate social responsibility to regularly provide staff cultural- sensitivity training and HIV AIDs awareness. For new corporates involved with the construction of dams, oil-palm or forest plantations this requirement to be made legally binding at the point the contract is awarded.
- To provide telecommunication links so that all of the villages can have access through handphones to people they trust and the authorities when they are faced with a problem. Not all will be able to afford this but these days there is likely to be someone in the village who can.
- That systems to report rape are made more accessible and user -friendly. The girl at the centre of the present case has had the courage and opportunity to go to Marudi police to report but the other girls in her village have not been able to use such a system. SWWS has recommended that the rural health clinics are made the first point of call and that the police are provided with their own /government transportation to go to the survivor. Currently the usual practice is for them to go on transport provided by logging companies as smaller police stations are not supplied with 4WDs.

Dependency on companies for transportation , poverty and the influx of new workers , be they foreigners or locals, into the area pervades this whole area of how to make young girls in the interior safe. SWWS has been working closely with the State Education Department, Health Department and local communities to raise awareness amongst youth and provide assistance. We recognize that there are a range of sexually-exploitative situations which not only involve foreigners but also locals working away from home. This particular case however is clearly rape and we hope that the focus will remain on this and the rapist. In the past there has been a tendency for the girl or victim to be on trial or be blamed and not the man.

Following the recent remarks about children born out of wedlock fathered by foreigners, SWWS notes it is should not be a problem registering these children as their mothers are Sarawakian so the child is too. The problem is the long-standing one of not all Sarawakians in the interior, in this case Penan women, have ICs or birth certificates themselves. A situation which is improving but still needs more consistent and concerted action by Jabatan Pendaftaran Negara. The full report – which also highlights the need for more action on the very worrying aspect of HIV/AIDS transmission – can be accessed through SWWS website at <http://sarswws.com/SWWS%20Booklet.pdf>

END

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