

NAPE NEWSLETTER



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A Spot Check on Gender Based Violence (GBV) in Uganda

Editorial



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— Chief Editor

Welcome to this edition of our publication, where we shine a light on one of the most urgent social challenges facing Uganda today—Gender Based Violence (GBV). As a society striving for equality, dignity and justice, it is important that we continue to confront the realities that undermine the safety and wellbeing of many women, girls and vulnerable groups. Gender-Based Violence refers to harmful acts directed at individuals based on gender differences and unequal power relations. It includes physical, sexual, emotional and psychological abuse as well as harmful practices such as early and forced marriages. While GBV can affect anyone, women and girls remain disproportionately affected.

In Uganda, the magnitude of the problem remains deeply concerning. According to national surveys, more than half of women aged 15–49 have experienced physical violence since the age of 15 and many continue to face abuse within homes, schools, workplaces and public spaces.

GBV manifests in many forms. Physical violence may include acts such as beating, slapping or other forms of assault. Emotional violence can involve humiliation, intimidation, threats or persistent criticism that erodes a person's dignity. Sexual violence including rape, unwanted touching and harassment continues to affect many individuals, often in silence due to stigma and fear. In some cases, harmful social norms also lead to practices such as denying girls access to education or forcing them into early marriages.

Much as Uganda has established a robust framework to combat Gender-Based Violence (GBV) through key legislation like the Domestic Violence Act (2010), the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2010), and the National Policy on Elimination of Gender Based Violence in Uganda (2016). However, much more remains to be done to challenge harmful norms, improve reporting mechanisms and ensure survivors receive justice and support. The Government institutions, civil society organizations and development partners should continue to work together to raise awareness, strengthen survivor support systems and promote accountability for perpetrators.

In this edition, our contributors explore GBV from different angles. They examine the root causes of violence, share community experiences, highlight prevention efforts and propose solutions that promote dignity, safety and empowerment. We invite you to engage with these insights, reflect on your role and join the collective effort to end Gender-Based Violence.



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Source: CADTM website

Gender-Based Violence and its Entrenchment in Culture



By Ainomugisha Shiba (Legal Officer)

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) remains one of the most persistent human rights challenges in Uganda. Although national laws and international frameworks condemn violence against women and girls, certain cultural norms and traditional practices continue to entrench inequality and normalize abuse. Practices such as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), Child marriages and incest are often sustained by deeply rooted beliefs about gender roles, family honor and social control. While culture is an important pillar of identity and cohesion, some customs have evolved in ways that perpetuate harm particularly against women and girls.

In Uganda, FGM has historically been practiced among communities in the Sebei sub-region and parts of Karamoja including the Sabin and Pokot. The practice is commonly justified as a rite of passage into womanhood and a pre-requisite for marriage. Girls who are not mutilated may face stigma, exclusion or reduced prospects for marriage. Despite the Prohibition of FGM Act of 2010 which criminalizes the practice, it continues in some areas due to secrecy, cross-border cutting and strong community pressure.



Sabiny girls after the FGM ritual in Bukwo district (Photo by New Vision)

FGM not only violates the bodily autonomy of girls but also exposes them to severe health risks such as excessive bleeding, infections, childbirth complications and psychological trauma. The persistence of FGM demonstrates how harmful norms can be shielded under the guise of tradition even when they directly contradict constitutional protections and human rights principles.

Similarly, child and early marriages remain a significant concern in Uganda. In some communities, marrying off a daughter early is seen as a way to secure family wealth through bride price, reduce the economic burden on households or protect a girl from premarital pregnancy. However, early marriages often lead to school dropouts, limited economic opportunities, early pregnancies and increased vulnerability to domestic violence. Young brides frequently lack decision-making power within marriage, making them more susceptible to physical, emotional and sexual abuse.

Although Uganda's laws set the minimum age of marriage at 18, enforcement challenges and entrenched social norms allow the practice to continue particularly in rural and economically disadvantaged areas. Incest and other forms of sexual violence within families further illustrate how cultural silence sustains GBV. While incest is widely condemned, it often remains hidden because families fear shame, stigma or damage to their reputation. Survivors may be pressured to remain silent to "protect" the family name while perpetrators exploit their authority within patriarchal household structures.

This culture of silence discourages reporting and denies survivors access to justice and psychosocial support. The normalization of male dominance within some family settings reinforces unequal power dynamics that enable abuse to persist.



A 13-year-old girl was allegedly defiled and impregnated by her cousin. Photo by watchdog

The entrenchment of GBV in cultural practices reflects broader patriarchal systems that prioritize male authority and female submissiveness. Women and girls are often socialized to endure hardship, preserve family unity and respect male dominance even at the expense of their own safety.

When violence is normalized as discipline, tradition or marital obligation, it becomes deeply embedded in everyday life. Addressing GBV therefore, requires more than legal reforms; it demands transformation of the social norms and belief systems that sustain inequality.

This is where the work of the National Association of Professional Environmentalists (NAPE) becomes particularly relevant. Although widely recognized for environmental advocacy, NAPE understands that environmental justice and gender justice are interconnected. Environmental degradation, land dispossession and extractive industries often intensify social stress and economic hardship which in turn can exacerbate domestic violence and exploitation of women and girls.

In Uganda's oil-affected districts such as Hoima, Buliisa and Kikuube, economic transitions and displacement have been linked to increased reports of GBV. NAPE has responded by integrating gender justice into its programming, recognizing that sustainable development cannot be achieved without protecting human rights.

Through community sensitization, advocacy campaigns and participation in initiatives such as the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence, NAPE raises awareness about harmful practices including FGM and child marriages. The organization has also established community-based safe spaces where survivors of GBV can access counseling, psychosocial support and referrals for legal assistance. These safe spaces include; Kyabigambire and Kigaaga in Hoima, Butimba in Kikuube, Wanseko in Buliisa, NAPE Community Green Radio in Kiboga among others. NAPE challenges harmful cultural narratives while promoting alternative norms rooted in dignity, equality and respect for human rights.

Importantly, NAPE's approach demonstrates that culture is not static. Traditions can evolve to reflect contemporary values of justice and inclusion without eroding community identity. Engaging elders, local leaders, women's groups and youth in conversations about the harmful consequences of FGM, early marriages and incest fosters collective ownership of change. By linking environmental sustainability with gender equality, NAPE highlights that protecting ecosystems and protecting women's rights are complementary goals in building resilient communities.

In conclusion, GBV in Uganda is deeply intertwined with certain cultural traditions and patriarchal norms that legitimize harmful practices such as FGM, child marriages and incest. While laws provide a critical framework for protection, meaningful change requires transforming the social attitudes that sustain violence.

Organizations like the National Association of Professional Environmentalists play a crucial role in bridging environmental advocacy with gender justice, demonstrating that sustainable development must be grounded in respect for human dignity. Ending GBV is not about abandoning culture; it is about reshaping it to uphold equality, safety and human rights for all.

Manifestation of Gender Based Violence in Land Ownership



By Kemigisha Ruth (Women Rights Advocate)

A person can become a landowner in Uganda through buying land, inheritance, as a gift, court order, allocation by government and customary allocation in rural areas. Land ownership in Uganda takes different forms and these include; Customary ownership which is based on traditional rules, Mailo ownership common in central Uganda with both owner and occupant rights, Freehold ownership which is permanent ownership with a title, Leasehold ownership where the government allocates a public land especially to the investors for a fixed period of time without transferring ownership.

The above land ownership systems do not have any segregation in land ownership. However, women tend to be marginalized when it comes to owning land where men are always favored due to traditional norms which often denies their legal or customary right to inherit land from parents, husbands or relatives. Women are often intentionally excluded from wills or land transfers. The patriarchal customs often prioritize men over women leaving them landless after the death of a spouse or parent yet the succession law in Uganda grants transfer of land ownership to the heirs or beneficiaries.

Whether there is a will (Testate) or no will (intestate) one is entitled to inherit property. A case in common is the 1999 [Best Kemigisha Vs Mabel Komuntale](#) in the high court where Justice Katutsi ruled that Best Kemigisha was entitled to administer her husband's estate for the benefit of herself and her children prioritizing legal succession over restrictive patriarchal traditional customs.

Islamic succession in Uganda, women are often discouraged or barred from owning and registering land in their own name. The cultural norms or spousal control prevents women from owning, selling or leasing land restricting their economic independence making them vulnerable to exploitation. The Islamic succession often clashes with the national statutory laws regarding women land rights particularly sharia law which provide unequal shares of property where women are

often given less compared to men and children are not allowed to inherit any property and upon the death of their husbands, women are forcefully evicted from land. In [Lawrence vs Lawrence](#) a 1995 case, the high court of Uganda ruled that the administration of estate (amendment act) 1992 which allows children to inherit their parent's property take precedence over sharia law which traditionally excludes children from inheriting property.

Often times women contribute towards buying a piece of land together with their spouses who at times end up not putting their names on the title/ sales agreement which causes violence and family break down and this may lead to separation and women are chased away from the land or property. Even when legally entitled, cultural practices may prevent them from claiming land thus property is sometimes taken over by male relatives or new spouses and those who assert their rights to land may face intimidation, harassment, assault, social exclusion among others.

To curb this there's need to;

Strengthen legal frameworks to enforce existing laws protecting women's land rights such as the Constitution, Land Act and Succession Act, increase awareness especially to men so that they can appreciate the need for women to own land and women should be educated about their legal rights to inherit, own and use land through community campaigns to challenge cultural norms that favor men over women.

Improve access to justice by establishing legal aid clinics and support services for women facing land disputes, promote land registration and documentation to encourage joint land ownership between spouses to protect women's rights ensuring women's names are included on land titles and lease agreements then monitor and report Gender Based Violence in land establishing reporting systems for forced evictions, disinheritance or land-related violence to monitor compliance with laws protecting women's land rights.

Unpacking Uganda's Workplace Gender Based Violence (GBV) Crisis



By Ninsiima Betty (Gender and Movement Strengthening Officer)

The Ugandan labor force is largely concentrated in the informal sector. According to the Uganda National Household Survey (2016/17), about 90 percent of workers are employed outside the formal sector. Jobs in this sector generally lack security and social protection, and women make up the majority of those in vulnerable employment, which reflects the gender disparities within the workforce.

Much as the Sustainable Development Goal 8.8 decrees that countries protect labour rights and promote safe and secure working environments of all workers including migrant workers and those in precarious employment, Uganda continues to grapple with the lack of more inclusive, violence free and diverse workplaces; equal pay for work of equal value; maternity protection; employment of persons with disabilities and the minimum social protection standards among other issues.

A lot of working conditions for women in the informal sector are also synonymous with meagre positions leading to meagre earnings, low productivity and hazardous conditions of work that undermine workers' fundamental rights. Women in the labour market are faced with a number of problems that range from gender inequality, discrimination and exposure to precarious work, sexual abuse and sexual harassment which marginalizes them further. Despite progress in legislation and awareness, GBV remains a significant challenge with far-reaching consequences for individuals, organizations and the economy.

In Uganda, GBV is a pervasive problem that manifests in various forms including sexual harassment and assault, discrimination in employment, promotion, opportunities, intimidation, abuse of power, unequal pay and benefits. A 2020 survey by the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS) revealed that 1 in 3 women in Uganda have experienced physical or sexual violence in their lifetime with many cases going unreported.

In the workplace, a 2019 study by the International Labour Organization (ILO) found that 60% of women

in Uganda's formal sector reported experiencing some form of GBV. The consequences of GBV affects not only the individual but also the organization and the economy as a whole.

GBV can lead to decreased productivity, performance, increased absenteeism, staff turnover, loss of talent and skills, damage to reputation and brand. As a result, organizations are losing valuable resources and the economy is missing out on the contributions that women could be making.

GBV continues to persist in Ugandan workplaces due to several factors including cultural and social norms that perpetuate gender stereotypes, patriarchy and inequality, lack of effective policies and procedures to address GBV, inadequate enforcement of existing laws and regulations, power imbalances, abuse of authority, limited access to support services and resources for survivors.

To address the GBV crisis in Ugandan workplaces, there is need to;

- Every work place should develop and implement comprehensive GBV policies that address GBV including clear reporting mechanisms and support services for survivors including counseling, medical care, legal assistance and have a disciplinary committee that investigates the allegations so that action is taken if it is true.
- Provide regular training and awareness programs to educate employees on GBV, its impact and the importance of a safe and respectful work environment.
- Promote a culture of equality, respect, challenging gender stereotypes and biases.
- Strengthen enforcement of laws and regulations ensuring that perpetrators are held accountable.

By working together, we can create a safer, more equitable and productive work environment for all. It's time for us to take action and say no to GBV in workplaces.

Gender Based Violence in refugee settlement camps



By Mrs. Alice Kazimura (NAPE Board member)

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is a harmful act perpetrated against individuals, often women and girls based on their gender in any community. It includes physical, emotional or physiological harm, elements of rape, sexual assault coupled with exploitation. It can also manifest in domestic violence as well as intimate partner violence, it can also manifest as forced marriages, trafficking and harassment. Its rooted in unequal power dynamics and societal norms. It affects families, communities as well as individual beings.

GBV takes the following shapes i.e. Physical violence, Sexual violence, Emotional/psychological violence and Economic violence. GBV in refugee camps which are temporary or semi-permanent places where people who have fled their homes due to conflict, persecution or natural disasters live. These camps provide basic necessities like food, water, shelter and healthcare. Uganda is one of the largest refugee-hosting nations in the world with roughly 1.95 million refugees as of October 2025 primarily from South Sudan and the Democratic Republic of the Congo.

The examples of refugee camps in Uganda include;

Nakivale Refugee Settlement camp in Isingiro hosting around 35,000 refugees, Rhino Refugee Settlement camp in Madi-Okollo and Terego with over 145, 820 refugees, Bidi Bidi Refugee Settlement camp in Yumbe hosting around 224,048 refugees, Kiryandongo Refugee Settlement camp in Kiryandongo, Kyaka II Refugee Settlement camp in Kyegegwa District, Rwamwanja Refugee Settlement camp in Kamwenge hosting around 70,000 refugees among others.

With the above refugee status in Uganda, the situation is quite complex in the settlement camps with many challenges such as overcrowding, high birthrates, limited resources and funding constraints. In the makeshifts (where refugees stay), gender-based violence manifests due to the above challenges. Economic hardships is one of the major causes of gender-based violence in particular, most women in the camps move long distances in unsafe and dark areas in search for food, water and firewood for the family.



Women in Bidibidi refugee settlement camp moving long distances in search for firewood. (Photo by JC Mcllwaine)

Since gender-based violence in refugee camps is largely a manifest of unstable livelihoods the following are some of the remedies that should be taken into consideration to address the vice.

These people flee their countries under circumstances that even claimed the lives of their dear ones, they should first and foremost be subjected to psychosocial support to deal with the trauma through creation of safe spaces by civil society organizations with support from donors and government. Thereafter refugees should be allowed to suggest solutions that are emerging from within the camp, neighboring and host communities to break the cycle of Gender-Based Violence (GBV).

The host communities should be informed about the rights of refugees especially women so that communities do not mistreat them to the extent of sexually abusing and harassing them on grounds of being considered non-natives. This would then call for skilling the women to attain financial independence so that they are not entirely dependant on their husbands ushering peace in their homes.

Gender based violence requires intensive dialoguing that involves men for clear understanding of the reasons why their spouses are precious thus need respect and protection. This would require male champions to speak against any form of violence thus changing the mindset of

men that are patriarchal.

For unsafe and dark areas in the camps, patrols and lighting should be instituted along the pathways to the firewood and water collection points. Where possible water collection points should be brought closer to their areas of stay hence mitigating sexual abuse and harassment in the refugee camps and host communities.

Create safe spaces where they do not exist and strengthen them where they already exist so that they are confidential and anonymous for women, men and children to report violence without fear of stigma or retaliation.

Both women and men should be sensitized about the health benefits of family planning and planning for the family, making it a household conversation rather than a secret which helps to overcome resistance between the couples on reproduction and productivity.

Gender based violence in refugee camps can be avoided and refugees like any other human beings once lived in calm environment. Some refugees once owned land, houses, had access to clean and safe water, businesses, jobs, schools, among others but because of the circumstances they find themselves as refugees not by choice. GBV due to limited or lack of resources' access is an unnecessary evil at all times and must be avoided.



Overcrowding in Palabek refugee settlement in Lamwo district. (Photo: INDEPENDENT website)

Living with the pain of Gender Based Violence among the Elderly in Uganda



By Bwengye Rajabu Yusufu (Executive Director, NAPE)

Across the globe, the elderly are persons aged 60 years and above. Generally according to available data, they constitute 10 percent of the total world population estimated to be around 850 elderly people and approximately 2.2 to 2.3 million people for the case of Uganda as of 2024 and 2025 constituting about 5% of the total population according to the 2024 population census.

Of the 2.3 million elderly people in Uganda, 56% are elderly women while 43% are elderly men. Important to also note is that out of the 2.3 million elderly people in Uganda, 17% of these still carry the burden of heading households while 72% still care for children either their own or those of granddaughters, sons or relatives and more importantly available statistics from the 2024 population census further reveal that 45% of the elderly class live in abject poverty while 85% of those still active are engaged in subsistence farming lacking both stable income and social security.

Because old age compromises the ability of the person to withstand stigma, compromises physical strength accompanied with endless illnesses, disability and abject poverty, the elderly have been ring fenced as the most vulnerable sections of the population when it comes to Sexual and Gender Based violence.

At the apex of the covid 19 pandemic and compromised social security at the time to date Amudat, Kasese, Tororo, Busia, Arua, Adjuman, Koboko, Moyo, Kyegegwa and Ntungamo districts have been reported as the top most districts with the highest rates of Gender Based violence inflicting more pain and misery to mainly children and the elderly people.

Their vulnerability compared to other population

age groups has been compounded by a multiplicity of factors that quite often has resulted into early death and inability to maximize their life span explaining the reason why in Africa and Uganda in particular, there are very rare celebrations of Super centenarians i.e people who have reached 110 years or older. Medical Research last reviewed and updated on 11th November 2024 by Cleveland Clinic indicates that without these social hard ships, illnesses and gender related stress, the elderly can live as long as 120 years plus with records revealing that Jeanne Calment lived 122 years and 164 days.

According to the present day realities and experiences, Gender Based Violence (GBV) among the elderly has been manifested in various forms. It has manifested itself in form of physical harm, beatings, starvation, sexual abuse, neglect where they are often treated as useless and helpless in society thus left with high levels of depression and witchcraft accusations.



Enhancing elderly mobility in Napak District. Older persons face neglect with caregivers failing to meet their basic needs or provide essential care. Photo by Steven Ariong

In some cases, the abuse comes in form of grabbing or confiscation of property including financial resources and in some situations killed in cold blood because of their defenseless nature and all these often result into acute physical and psychological consequences including early death often intensified by social isolation, dependence on caregivers, illness and poverty.

Quite often, Gender Based Violence (GBV) detailed above hits the elderly people the hardest compared to the rest of the age groups due to salient factors which include; Due to age-related physiological changes, older victims because of their physical vulnerability sustain more severe injuries and emotional trauma from assaults and can hardly defend themselves in any form.

Older adults are often dependent on their abusers (children or partners or helpers) for care, food and medication, making it difficult to leave or report the abuse in fear of post report consequences. Reduced mobility and social networks make elderly victims more isolated, allowing abuse to go unnoticed and in most times physically unable to follow up the abuses they face.

Poverty compounds every form of vulnerability and abuse because the poor elderly see it as a waste of time to report abusers without having

the financial muscle to follow up any form of abuse they suffer. This is further complicated by their education levels and inability to understand the present day legal and justice landscape that often leaves them compromised and on the mercy of the abusers.

However, all is not lost and something can still be done to save the elderly class from GBV and related stigma. No single approach can address this world-wide vice and thus practitioners ranging from government, civil society, local and national leaders, women activists must think of a multifaceted approach that tackles core drivers of GBV among the elderly people.

There is need for a multilayered approach that tackles ageism, improves tracking of abuses, reporting mechanisms and takes affirmative actions in providing specialized care to GBV victims.

Enacting and enforcing special legislation that protects older people, implements care giver training, increasing social support to combat elder isolation, instituting heavy penalties to elder abusers and investing in specialized medical and psychosocial support services for the elderly are key strategies that can cause change and create a smile in the evening years of their life on earth.



Photo by URBRA

Our culture teaches us to honor our elders, and one of the most important ways to do so is by protecting them from harm. Even when that threat comes from within the family. It is everyone's collective responsibility to look out for the safety of older persons and raise awareness, ensuring they are empowered to age with the dignity they deserve

Gender-Based Violence Against Men in Intimate Relationships



By Omony Polycarp (Communication Officer)

Gender-based violence is a common occurrence and has for a long time been completely recognized as an issue that is only affecting women in our society especially in marriages where men are silently suffering from the vice. Men experience different forms of GBV and this ranges from sexual harassment, sexual violence, physical violence, emotional to financial gender-based violence.

However, these different forms of GBV incidents against men are rarely reported by them. Both men and women are victims of this crime but in most cases, it turns out that majority of men experiencing gender-based violence from their intimate partners tend to shy away from reporting the incidents because of the most women-centred government policies which only favours women, lack of awareness, weak protection of male GBV victims by law enforcement agencies and strong cultural traditional values that men are assumed to be which causes family break down in some place which at some point result into separation and sometimes divorce resulting into sharing of property.

Some men ran away from their families because of violence leaving the children and their wives as single mothers which sometimes result into women selling land to take care of the family. In African culture, while men can certainly be victims of gender-based violence, it is perceived as a weakness when they complain that their women harass or beat them. Their masculinity or manhood culturally stops them from expressing it out thus suffering in silence.

Many people think that the fight on gender-based violence would only mean addressing the abuse that women and girls go through. Most men are the victims of violence caused by women and suffer in silence because of shame, fear and the embarrassment that comes with admitting that

they have been abused or beaten by their wives lowering the chance of such cases from being reported. While it is true that the majority of the women are experiencing gender-based violence, we cannot run away from the fact that men too experience violence from women. Women are just as capable as men when it comes to causing gender-based violence.

Even though there have been so many cries, petitions, walks and various activities that have been conducted in the past and the present to bring to light the violence against women around the world, violence against men is equally a reality and is happening in every society to varying extent. However, it is just unfortunate that this particular violence does not get as much attention as it should.

Regardless of how small the number of men going through violence is, there is need for this type of violence to be a concern in societies. Women who face gender-based violence are highly supported globally and are given meaningful attention they deserve which is a total opposite for men.



Women are just as capable as men when it comes to causing Gender-Based Violence. Photo by Daily Monitor

Men suffer depression, abandonment of families and other tragic consequences but most will conceal it. They conceal pain and vulnerability as a way of policing their masculinity. There will not be empathy when men disclose that they've been victims of gender-based violence. Men's complaints will not be treated seriously at best and male victims may find themselves being belittled at worst and these are biases that both men and women must fight to remove.

Most men speak in silence about how and what they feel, especially when they are victims of gender-based violence. In a world where gender-based violence is gaining greater attention on a global level, there is no focus on men as victims. The narrative has gotten lost in the focus on women and girls as victims while men and boys are taken as perpetrators.

While we teach the young that violence against women is bad and should be stopped, we must change the whole narrative and emphasize that violence against any gender is bad and must be addressed. Government, civil society organisations

and traditional leaders should work together so that violence against both genders is addressed with one heart.

Some interventions should include;

- Community mobilisation and awareness of Gender Based Violence to change the narrative that men are the only perpetrators.
- Provision of psychosocial support, health care and legal support should also be provided to men who are the victims of GBV
- Training and sensitisation of duty bearers on their role in prevention and response to GBV
- Developing guidelines for the establishment and management of Gender Based Violence Shelters in Uganda to accommodate both genders.
- Facilitation and empowerment of traditional and cultural leaders to develop action plans, policy briefs and commitments to prevent and respond to GBV
- Promoting male involvement in the prevention and response to GBV e.g. in the National Policy on elimination of Gender Based Violence in the family.



Pictorial



Women at NAPE Community Green Radio (CGR) discussing how extractive sector activities are contributing to Gender-Based Violence in the Albertine Rift, sharing grassroots experiences on the impacts on women's safety, livelihoods and the environment.



NAPE joined the nation in commemorating the 16 Days of Activism Against GBV 2025 calling for an end to Gender-Based Violence and urge all stakeholders to invest in prevention and response efforts. Every woman and girl deserve to live a life free from violence and fear.

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