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## **STATEMENT ON RAMPANT ABUSE OF CHILDREN** **AND HOW TO CURB IT**

**By RAS MUBARAK, MP FOR KUMBUNGU**

Many Ghanaians read with shock recent reports about a five year old boy from Abura Dunkwa who lost his left hand from a machete wound he sustained from his Step Mother. Five year old Isaac Mensah's crime was that he had defecated on the farmland, and out of anger, the step mother hit him with a machete. The injured hand festered resulting in an amputation at the Cape Coast Regional hospital in the central region.

Our constitution is quite clear in Article Twenty Eight (1), (2), (3) and (4). For emphasis Mr. Speaker, Article 28 (2) states that "every child has the right to be protected from engaging in work that constitutes a threat to his health, education or development." So to begin with, five year old Mensah should have been in school and not on the farm.

Just when the nation was reeling from the shock of the abhorrent attack on Isaac Mensah and his amputation, we were greeted with news of another evil treatment of a child by adults. In Bolgatanga, an eleven year old boy – Maxwell Ayinbisa was set ablaze for allegedly peeping at a woman in a bathroom. Maxwell, who apparently wasn't the one who did

the peeping, was sent to buy petrol, and when he returned, a group of adults, led one Nsonbila John, took the petrol from this lad, poured it on him and set him ablaze.

Article twenty eight (3) of the constitution is clear about such behavior. It reads, "A child shall not be subjected to torture or other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment."

Mr. Speaker, very often, we hear about horrendous abuse of children by parents or guardians in our society – a society of church goers and mosque goers. Take for example the case of a four year old girl who was raped by an eighteen year old lad in 2017. The child had to go through reconstructive surgery – scarred for the rest of her life, and for several weeks the perpetrator of this outrageous crime was walking freely. According to a BBC Focus on Africa report on 27<sup>th</sup> October 2017, a local chief had told the parents of the molested child that "nothing could be done because the community gods deemed the suspect innocent." Subsequently, he was arrested, tried and set free for lack of evidence.

Mr. Speaker, the Children's Act of 1998 – ACT 560 also provides guidance on the way to treat our children. And for those who do not want to be legalese, there is enough counsel in the Bible, Quran and Torah about how we should treat children. In Mathew 18:10, "take heed that ye despise not one of these

little children; for I say to you, that in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my father which is in heaven.” Is it that people have little or no regard to what laws say, or simply refuse to heed the sermons? What these people do is simply unpardonable.

I would like to commend the Minister for Gender, Children and Social Protection – for her pledge to adopt five year old Isaac Mensah. I pray that others would emulate her example in our society. But what we need more than an adoption is for relevant institutions to intensify public education on the relevant laws and the punishments thereof.

Mr. Speaker, as parent, I cringe, when I hear such atrocious things done to children. These crimes are becoming too rampant because of the kinds of punishment people get. Defilement is a second degree felony which can attract punishment between five and twenty-five years. I think it is too light. We should change the laws – so that for defilement, any adult should go in for life imprisonment, without the possibility of a parole.

On torture or causing bodily harm to children, it is another crime that the courts take seriously. It is also a second degree felony and could attract punishment from five up to twenty five years. If step mothers, guardians and misfits like John Nsonbila are aware they could be looking at twenty-five years in hard

labour, they may think twice about inflicting bodily-harm on children. And for opinion leaders who abet these crimes or stand in the way of punishing these wackadoos, they should be looking at ten years in jail. Until we send a clear signal about our abhorrence of such abnormal behavior, it would continue, it would upset us; we would talk about it for a day or two, and sweep it under the carpet.

Children are gifts from God and as such should be treated with the utmost care and love. The ministry of Gender, Children and Social Protection should have a policy on building a compassionate society. It should be a program at the heart of this and future governments where as God envisaged, "the hungry be fed, naked be clothed, aged protected and children cared for." I thank you Mr. Speaker.