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Friday 24th February 2023

For Immediate Release:

Coalition of Organisations Working on Sexual Violence in Kenya Demands Action on "Sex for Work: The True Cost of Our Tea" Documentary

Nairobi, Kenya: We as the Coalition of Organizations Working on Sexual Violence in Kenya are appalled and deeply saddened by the revelations in the BBC One Panorama investigative report titled *Sex for Work: The True Cost of Our Tea* that aired on 20th February 2023. The documentary highlights the horrific working conditions and sexual exploitation faced by women and girls in the tea industry. It also exposes the dark reality of what women and girls have to endure to get and keep their jobs in tea plantations. The film shows how women are forced to provide sexual favors to their male supervisors and colleagues, to get and retain jobs.

Unfortunately, despite the tea industry being worth billions of dollars, the women who work in the fields are some of the most exploited, poor and vulnerable in the world. The industry's hidden cost is the exploitation of vulnerable women workers who are denied basic human rights, such as freedom from sexual abuse, right to health, fair wages and safe working conditions. It must be noted that these allegations are historical and have been documented for decades by civil society organisations including police reports of the sexual abuse of children in the farms that are not acted upon. This lack of action by implicated farms points to a culture of looking the other way in order to benefit from a workforce that is emotionally, mentally and physically broken rendering the women and girls incapable of fighting for their rights.

Sexual abuse and harassment in the workplace has far reaching effects which range from mental and physical health problems including anxiety, depression, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), HIV/AIDS, Sexually transmitted diseases and other stress-related illnesses. They may also experience a loss of self-esteem and confidence, which can negatively affect all areas of their lives. Additionally workplace sexual violence and harassment also have broader societal impacts. These incidents continue to perpetuate gender inequality and reinforce harmful social norms and attitudes towards women which serve to ensure that women are suppressed socially and economically.

We are aware that there are global and local safeguarding policies to combat workplace sexual violence and harassment. The International Labor Organization's (ILO) Convention on Violence and Harassment, which was adopted in 2019, and the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which include a goal to promote gender equality and empower women and girls.

In Kenya, the government has enacted several policies and laws to address workplace sexual violence and harassment. The Employment Act (2007), which prohibits discrimination and sexual harassment in the workplace, and the Sexual Offences Act (2006), which criminalizes sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence. Additionally, the government has established the National Gender and Equality Commission, State Department of Gender and affirmative action, Kenya National commission on human rights which are responsible for promoting Human rights, gender equality and addressing issues related to sexual violence and harassment. In spite of the robust legal and policy frameworks in place there remains a huge challenge in implementation of the same which leaves many women in the world of work exposed and at risk of continuous sexual harassment exploitation and abuse.

We as the Coalition of Organizations Working on Sexual Violence in Kenya make the following demands:

1. THAT the institutions implicated in the documentary immediately and at their own cost provide the survivors and those at risk access to immediate independent medical, psychosocial and legal aid services
2. THAT the institutions implicated immediately provide compensation for all women and girls who have been violated in the tea plantations.
3. THAT the institutions implicated show cause why their licenses should not be altogether revoked and their businesses shut down for lack of compliance with local and international standards for safety and protection especially for women in the workplace.
4. THAT the institutions implicated immediately put in place internal mechanisms to identify perpetrators and forward all names to the Directorate of Criminal Investigations.
5. THAT the Directorate of Criminal investigations (DCI) initiates thorough investigations to establish the extent of the sexual harassment in the institutions, businesses and individuals implicated in the BBC documentary and in the tea sector at large.
6. THAT the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions makes public the findings of the Inspector General report and pursues to the full extent of the law as well as build systems for strong evidence collection for this and other similar cases as a way to protect Kenyan women.
7. THAT the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection immediately puts in place measures to implement ILO convention 190 and to enforce compliance in the world of work
8. THAT all Kenyans of good will, global citizens and trading partners of the implicated institutions immediately suspend patronage and business with the said institutions until all perpetrators are identified, charged and prosecuted and the said institutions publicly demonstrate real measures put in place to protect women at the workplace.
9. THAT the Witness Protection Agency puts in place measures to protect the whistleblowers in the documentary and other who may subsequently come forward to provide information around the sexual harassment exploitation and abuse in the tea factories and plantations

Sex for Work: The True Cost of Our Tea is a wake-up call to the world. It is time for us to take action to end this horrific practice and ensure that all women workers are treated with the equality, respect and dignity they deserve.

Signed

Coalition of Organizations Working on Sexual Violence in Kenya