

Kenya's solution to a history of systematic impunity and human rights violations may finally come in the form of the proposed recommendations, by the recently released Waki Commission.

The formation of an international tribunal which is objective, and acknowledges that sexual crimes in times of political instability constitute genocidal or war crimes may deliver the much needed justice.

It has been nine months now, but times are still hard for women who were sexually abused.

For these women, life is still far removed from the reality as they knew it.

We have heard their heart-wrenching experiences of the tragedy that befell them in the wake of post-election violence.

Their tears, pain and bitterness have also not gone unnoticed to us.

As these women struggle to piece together the broken pieces of their lives, it has become business as usual for most Kenyans.

One such woman is \*Edith Kanana, who sought help at the Nairobi Women's Hospital.

"It has been tough, some days I feel like my old self, but there are those days I feel a heavy sense of depression, I was pregnant when I was gang raped and consequently miscarried," says the 36 year old mother of four.

"I was infected with a sexually transmitted disease, the doctor said that chances of me getting another child are very low."

The infection was so bad that a foul smelling liquid was constantly flowing from her private parts as well as a persistent itch that would cause painful soars.

Hers was not a peculiar problem; scores of women found themselves in the same predicament.

\*Jane Wanga knows that problem all too well, “Having taken time before going to the hospital because with no money, I didn’t know where to go, mine became a serious case of chronic infection.”

“When I couldn’t bear it any longer, I confided in a close neighbor, incidentally, she had the same problem but fortunately for her, she was under medication.”

Through this friend, Jane found her way to the Kenyatta National Hospital (KNH) Gender Violence Recovery Centre.

At the Center, she found many women who had been sexually assaulted.

Eunice Ruhi, a counselor at the Casualty Department, KNH, explains what an involving experience it has been treating and supporting survivors of sexual assault.

“We have encouraged them, supported them and shown them why it is important to continue with follow-up sessions; experiences such as these require consistent attention,” the counselor expounds.

KNH which has three catchments departments for sexual violence cases; the Casualty Department, Youth Clinic and the Patient Support Centre, has continued to assess progress made by these survivors of sexual violence.

Sadly, cases of sexual violence keep rising.

“The number of sexual violence cases have increased from 461 to 570, that is without including the ones associated with post election violence,” explains the Matron in charge of the Patient Support Unit, Elizabeth Mukhisa.

“Cases associated with the violence are treated differently, we have done the best we can to support these survivors through their healing process.”

Women assaulted during the political upheaval have had many health problems including reproductive health.

“We have taken them through the post rape care, which involves intense treatment and counseling.

In addition, this care is very useful within the legal process because the documentation would form part of the medical report when tabling evidence in the pursuit of justice,” expounds Elizabeth Mukhisa.

“They have been treated for chronic infections because some didn’t come to the hospital immediately the incident happened; there have been follow-ups to clear vaginal infections.”

Although the physical evidence of a reproductive health problem may have been cleared by an anti-biotic, these women have psychological problems that affect the status of their reproductive well being.

“Some women are still in fear of men which does affect relationships, others have low libido which is a challenge to a couple,” says Eunice Ruhi.

Elizabeth Mukhisa concurs with her “There are others who would want to start new relationship but the stigma associated with being a survivor of rape continue to shadow them.”

In order to comprehensively heal the wounds that these women still have, KNH has continued to offer these women support through group therapy.

“We started with 32 women, two of them had become pregnant out of the incident but dropped out of our sessions along the way, one young woman died and now we have 15 women who continually come for support,” says Elisabeth Mukhisa.

In addition, she says that most of those women who do not attend went to their rural homes, while others have to attend to their places of work which has made it difficult for them to come to the clinic.

The Matron also says that there is a social worker who is in charge of this group of women.

“They are all from Kibera Slums, one of the areas which had the highest cases of sexual abuse during the political instability, we have tried to keep the link between the hospital and them open because we know that they still need help,” adds Elizabeth Mukhisa.

Eunice Ruhi says that it takes time and a lot of effort to help survivors of rape to recover a sense of what they were before the assault.

“The survivors of gender based violence have had to live with those memories and physical discomfort due to infections,” explains Millicent Obaso.

“They have had to struggle with the pain of abandonment, where mainly the male partner finds it hard to continue living with a partner who was raped, and stigma, the list is endless.”

She therefore adds that this nature of follow-ups can heal the deep wounds survivors of sexual assault will have to live with for the rest of their lives, “it provides a sense of closure to such an

unfortunate past.”