



## Sanga Sanga Pastors Conference



## Child Safety in the Church: Session One By Philip E. Morrison

I have been a missionary in Kenya since 1992 working primarily in Theological Education. In April 2014 I received training as a Child Safety Investigator with the Child Safety and Protection Network and thus chose Child Safety within the Africa Inland Church as the subject of my Doctor of Ministry dissertation.

Although my dissertation regarding child safety was researched within the Africa Inland Church-Kenya (AIC-K), I believe that much of what I found in my research within the AIC-K can be used and applied in other churches as well. In the literature on CSA, I found virtually no mention of the Church's role in addressing the issue. Nowhere is there serious recognition that the church with its resources and influence could make a significant contribution in dealing with CSA.



After the first data collection meeting, a pastor came to me with tears in his eyes to tell me that his very own daughter had been sexually abused. He related that he and his family were getting little support, especially from the police, but he said, "We are still pursuing." He said, "However, my daughter is now focused on becoming a lawyer to help women who have suffered like her." This experience put a face on

my research and confirmed that my focus on what child safety policies and procedures were present, if any, in the AIC congregations was vital.



I must remind us that we are in a battle. We dare not enter into dealing with child sexual abuse without remembering that we are engaging in spiritual warfare. Personally, for me, these last 3-4 years have been extremely difficult spiritually as I have delved into the research of child sexual abuse. Satan doesn't want this evil in the church, and in our society, to be exposed. He wants to be able to continue the

destruction of lives and ministries.



### 1. The presence of CSA: General Statistics.

In my studies on CSA, I found that no matter where in the world studies have been done, the statistics are fairly much on the same level. This is sad, because statistics are high and even what we have is generally believed by researchers to be under reported.



In my studies in Kenya according to the statistics from a Kenyan Government and United Nations study that 32% of girls and 18% of boys under the age of 18 were sexually abused.<sup>i</sup>



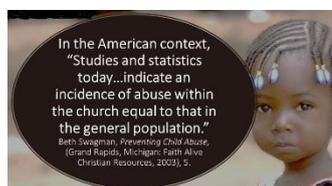
As I was preparing for this seminar, I wondered what the statistics would be for Tanzania.

In a doctoral thesis, published in 2017, Denis McCrann found that in the general population of Tanzania violence against children is a serious problem: nearly 3 in 10 (30%) females and approximately 1 in 7 males (14%) in Tanzania have experienced sexual violence prior to the age of 18.<sup>ii</sup>



## 2. The presence of CSA in the church.

In my research I could not find statistics relating to the prevalence of CSA specifically within the Kenyan or the Tanzania Churches.

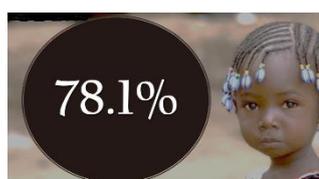


However, in regards to the American context, "Studies and statistics today...indicate an incidence of abuse within the church equal to that in the general population."<sup>iii</sup>

Because there is a similarity of statistics globally regarding the incidence rate of CSA in the general population, I felt that it would be highly probable that we would find the presence of child sexual abuse (CSA) in the church as well.

So, with that in mind, though my statistics are from the Kenyan church, we can probably say that things will be similar for the church in Tanzania as well.

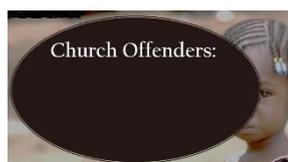
I did research in seven different counties in Kenya, in both rural and urban settings and in different tribal areas.



What I found in this broad representation of the population was that seventy-eight percent of the respondents reported knowledge of incidents of CSA.



My research found over 227 incidents of CSA which were reported from 107 of the 137 respondents who participated in the research. Thus, even in this small sample we can see that CSA is a serious problem not only in our society or communities at large, but also, sadly enough, in our churches as well.



Another evidence to the presence of CSA in the church is the identities of the perpetrators who were identified in the research.



**[CLICK:]** When the categories of Pastor, Church leader, and Sunday School teacher are totalled, we see that **59.5** percent of the offenders in the incidents cited were those in leadership positions within the church.

This indicates a serious need for the church to address this issue in terms of screening prospective church leaders and disciplining present leaders who may be involved in CSA.



2. What can be done? There are three main areas that we need to bring into our churches on the issue of CSA.



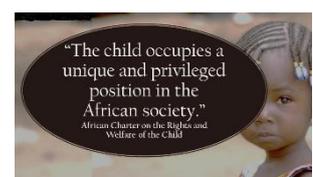
2.1. The Church must be involved in **Instruction**. I believe that one of the reasons why CSA hasn't dealt with this is because there hasn't been substantial instruction on the issue within our churches.



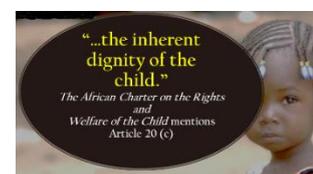
2.1.1. The first area of instruction that we must look at is the cultural view of children versus the biblical view of children. I believe that a perpetrator's view of the value and worth of a child is a large contributing factor to CSA.



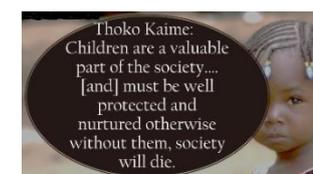
- First, there is the **Professed** cultural view. Actually, this is a high view of the value and worth of a child.



For example: *African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child* states: "The child occupies a unique and privileged position in the African society."<sup>iv</sup>



And it mentions, "the inherent dignity of the child."<sup>v</sup>



Thoko Kaime commenting on the Charter wrote,

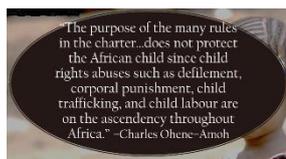
"In Africa, traditional value systems recognise...that all humans, by virtue of being human alone, are entitled to humanity, respect and dignity. ... In relation to children, this African conception of human rights has manifested itself in the recognition that *children are a valuable part of the society... [C]hildren must be well protected and nurtured otherwise without them, society will die.*

Thus, African traditional culture recognises the intrinsic worth of children and of the need to protect them.<sup>vi</sup> *Unfortunately, the practiced view does not always match up to the professed view.*



Again, quoting Kaime: "African children suffer a lot from deleterious cultural practices and notions which enjoy more legitimacy than international children's rights norms."<sup>vii</sup>

**In other words, African children suffer from harmful cultural practices and ideas which are more important in our society than what are the rights proclaimed by international organizations."**



Charles Ohene–Amoh adds, “The purpose of the many rules in the charter...does not protect the African child since child rights abuses such as defilement, corporal punishment, child trafficking, and child labour are on the ascendency throughout Africa.”<sup>viii</sup>



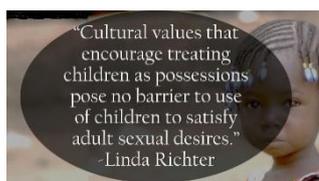
- Secondly, there is the **Practised** cultural view: (I am going to, in some ways, paint with a broad brush, but these views are present in many of the cultures in Africa.)



The first view is that *Children are a man's property*.



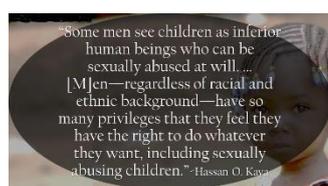
The National Director of South African National Council for Child Welfare said that the “*most fundamental [root problem] was how the children are being viewed: that children were a commodity.*”<sup>ix</sup>



Linda Richter adds, “Cultural values that encourage treating children as possessions pose no barrier to use of children to satisfy adult sexual desires.”<sup>x</sup>



The second practised view is that *Children are viewed as inferior*. And what we mean by this is they are inferior to adults to start with. As human beings they have less value and worth than adults.



Hassan O. Kaya reports, “In the South African context, for example, some men see children as inferior human beings who can be sexually abused at will. ... [M]en—regardless of racial and ethnic background—have so many privileges that they feel they have the right to do whatever they want, including sexually abusing children.”<sup>xi</sup>



Within the category of children there is a definite hierarchy as well.



Boys head this hierarchy. They are more valued than girls.

The Tanzania Ministry of Community Development, Gender And Children, *Child Development Policy* states in Issue 57:

Due to different Tanzanian cultures and customs, parents and guardians usually value boy children more as compared to girl children, which leads to girl children at times to be denied of their basic rights, and consequently having

relatively poor development.



For example, boys are always preferred over girl, in schooling issues, they are always given the chance to play, rest and the right to recreation while girls are necessitated to help their mothers with domestic chores.<sup>xii</sup>

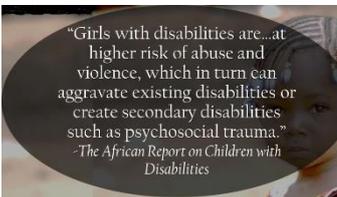


The next on this hierarchy are the disabled including both boys and girls.



*The African Report on Violence Against Children* outlines the serious situation disabled children face and the high rate of frequency of abuse they experience when they state,

“Half of the children with disabilities reported abuse at 1-3 times a week – this is more often than any other category of children.”<sup>xiii</sup>

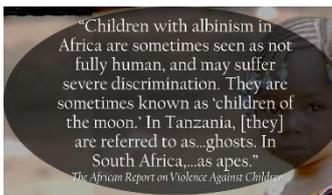


Again, within this heading the order would be boys and then girls. *The African Report on Children with Disabilities* states: “Girls with disabilities are...at higher risk of abuse and violence, which in turn can aggravate existing disabilities or create secondary disabilities such as psychosocial trauma.”<sup>xiv</sup>

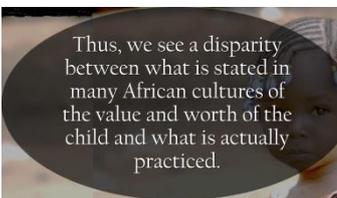
I was at a child safety conference in early June and one of the facilitators told of disabled girls who can’t speak, or walk, or even move from their beds who are giving birth because they are raped at will by the children home staff members.



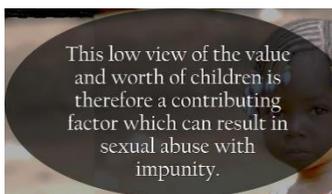
The lowest level on this inferiority hierarchy are albinos.



*The African Report on Violence Against Children* points this out: “Children with albinism in Africa are sometimes seen as not fully human, and may suffer severe discrimination. They are sometimes known as ‘children of the moon.’ In Tanzania, for example, people with albinism are referred to as...ghosts. In South Africa, albinos are commonly referred to as apes.”<sup>xv</sup>



Thus, we see a disparity between what is stated in many African cultures of the value and worth of the child and what is actually practiced.



This low view of the value and worth of children is therefore a contributing factor which can result in sexual abuse with impunity.

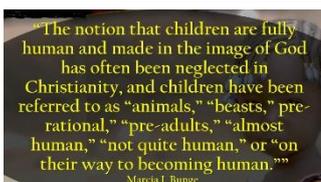


2.1.2. A biblical view of children.



- Children have value and worth because they are God's image bearers. (Genesis 1:26).

But it has not always been the case in the Christian world.



Marcia J. Bunge wrote: "The notion that children are fully human and made in the image of God has often been neglected in Christianity, and children have been referred to as "animals," "beasts," pre-rational," "pre-adults," "almost human," "not quite human," or "on their way to becoming human.""<sup>xvi</sup>



- Children are God's handiwork. (Psalm 139:13-15). Children are knitted together or embroidered by God. They are fearfully and wonderfully made. Children are a masterpiece of God's creation.



- Children are ranked a little lower than angels. (Psalms 8:5). Speaking of humanity, which would include children, David writes: "You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honour."



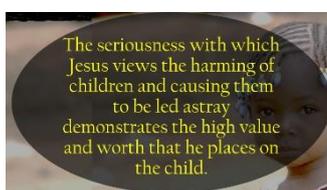
- Children are a blessing from God.



- (Psalm 127:3-5).  
<sup>3</sup>Children are a heritage from the Lord, offspring a reward from him...  
<sup>5</sup> Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them."



- Jesus held a high view of a child's value and worth. (Matthew 18:1-7).



The seriousness with which Jesus views the harming of children and causing them to be led astray demonstrates the high value and worth that he places on the child.



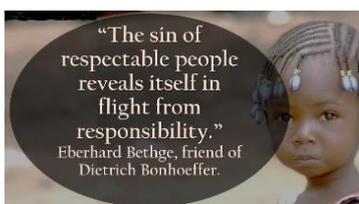
Conclusion: We take care of that which we value.



Is the African church taking care of its children? If not, do we really value them?

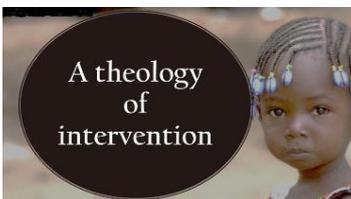


2.2. The need for the church to be **Involved** in child safety.



Eberhard Bethge, friend of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, said, *“The sin of respectable people reveals itself in flight from responsibility.”*<sup>xvii</sup>

If God’s people fly away from its responsibility before God, it reveals an area of sin in their life.



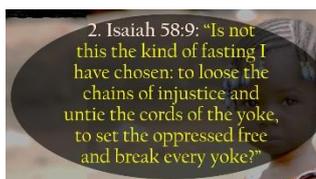
This leads us then to look at “A theology of intervention.” (This is spelled out in detail in my book, *For Our Children! For Our Church!*)



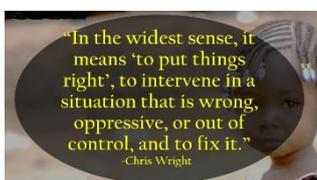
2.2.1. The Biblical Basis. (Here a few of the many biblical references which calls out to us as God’s people to be people involved in justice issues.)



- Micah 6:8: “And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”



- Isaiah 58:9: “Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?”

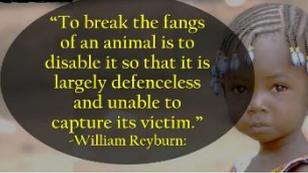


Speaking of justice, Chris Wright says, “In the widest sense, it means ‘to put things right’, to intervene in a situation that is wrong, oppressive, or out of control, and to fix it.”<sup>xviii</sup>



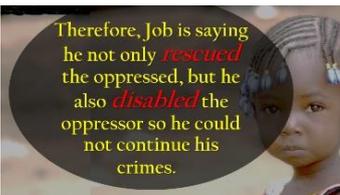
3. Job 29:17:  
I broke the fangs of  
the wicked and  
snatched the victims  
from their teeth.

Job in Job 29:17, in discussing his acts of intervention says, “I broke the fangs of the wicked and snatched the victims from their teeth.”



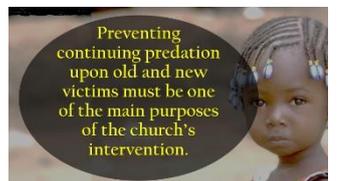
“To break the fangs  
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William Reyburn says, “To break the fangs of an animal is to disable it so that it is largely defenceless and unable to capture its victim.”<sup>xxix</sup>



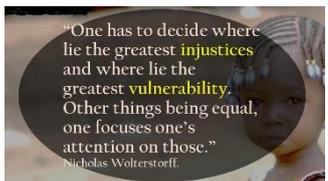
Therefore, Job is saying  
he not only *rescued*  
the oppressed, but he  
also *disabled* the  
oppressor so he could  
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crimes.

Therefore, Job is saying he not only rescued the oppressed, but he also disabled the oppressor, so he could not continue his crimes.



Preventing  
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“One has to decide where  
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Other things being equal,  
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Therefore, as Nicholas Wolterstorff says, “One has to decide where lie the greatest injustices and where lie the greatest vulnerability. Other things being equal, one focuses one's attention on those.”<sup>xxx</sup>



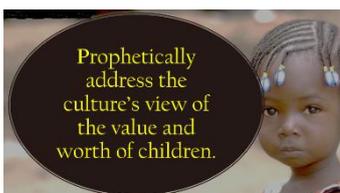
Initiating  
Action

2.3. Thirdly, we must be **Initiating Action** in the area of making our churches safe places. This grows out of number two, Involvement in child safety.



Proactive  
Interventions

2.3.1. Proactive Interventions.



Prophetically  
address the  
culture's view of  
the value and  
worth of children.

- First, **prophetically** address the culture's view of the value and worth of children. As a church we cannot remain silent on this issue!



Rescue children  
who are being  
sexually abused.

Secondly, **rescue** children who are being sexually abused.

"This is what the Lord says: 'Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed.'" (Jer. 22:3a).

Jeremiah writes, "This is what the Lord says: 'Do what is just and right. Rescue from the hand of the oppressor the one who has been robbed.'" (Jeremiah 22:3a)

The passage is speaking of those who had been robbed economically in one way or another. But this principle of intervention is applicable to the victims of child sexual abuse who have been robbed of their virginity, innocence, and dignity.

Speak up for the victims of abuse. Proverbs 31:8-9

- Thirdly, speak up for the victims of abuse. Proverbs 31:8-9 says, "8Speak up for those who cannot speak for themselves, for the rights of all who are destitute. 9Speak up and judge fairly; defend the rights of the poor and needy."

Defend those who suffer from abuse or are at risk of being abused.

- Fourthly, **defend** those who suffer from abuse or are at risk of being abused.

How do we defend?

How do we defend victims of child sexual abuse?

**Defending means:**

Shelter victims from public ridicule and shame.

We should **Shelter** victims from public ridicule and shame.

Keep identities of the abused and details of the abuse as private as possible.

And secondly, **Keep** identities of the abused and details of the abuse as private as possible. People are always going to be curious and people are always going to gossip. So, confidentiality, as much as possible is essential.

Administer justice for both the victim and perpetrator.

- Thirdly, **administer justice** for both the victim and perpetrator.

Walter Brueggemann sees justice "as a positive and aggressive action ... it is active intervention to transform society. And that transformation, on the one hand, means to act favourably toward the weak and, on the other hand, effectively against the abusive wrong."

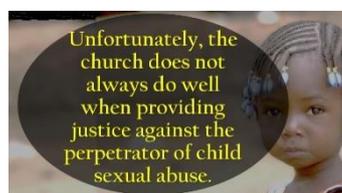
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It is only by bringing the perpetrator to justice that justice can be gained for the victim.

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If the church does not report perpetrators to the authorities, they are covering up a crime and thus become accessories to the fact.



Unfortunately, the church does not always do well when providing justice against the perpetrator of child sexual abuse.



We can see this in the results in Table 3.

Table 3. What action was taken against the offender?

Type of Action:	Percentage
Disciplined by the denomination	21.1%
Disciplined by the local church	32.3%
Transferred to another post	11.7%
Reported to the local governmental authorities	66.3%
Nothing	17%
Unknown	4.3%



It is interesting that according to the data more incidents were handled by turning the offender over to the governmental authorities (66.3 percent) as opposed to those which were handled by church discipline.

However, this is not really an entirely effective intervention. It is necessary, but it is only part of the intervention. Often the governmental authorities do not take the cases of child abuse seriously.

Denis McCrann comments on the situation in Tanzania. “The legal system does not handle cases of CSA with sufficient care. For example, paying a small fee to the family of the victim settles the problem in the short term but the perpetrator is free to continue abusing other children. In addition, in cases that do make it to court, the child is treated like an adult.”<sup>xxii</sup>



The figures for church discipline showed that 21.1 percent were disciplined by the denomination and 32.3 percent were disciplined by the local church for a combined total of 53.4 percent of cases handled in this manner.

These figures are low whether one is looking at fulfilling the biblical command of church discipline or the obligation of the church to turn over the offender to the governmental authorities.



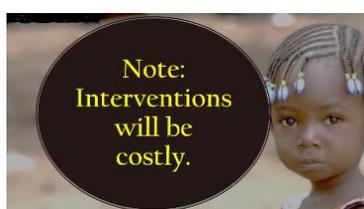
In addition, 11.7% were transferred to another post. Thus, they were not disciplined, nor turned over to the authorities for the process of justice to take place and in this way the “infection” was spread to another part of the body of Christ. It is common that perpetrators will continue their activity once they move to another place.



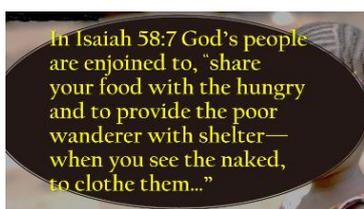
Finally, we notice that in 17% of the cases nothing was done at all!

This is very concerning as it can give a message to the offenders that often nothing is done to those who commit CSA and thus may encourage them to continue their abusive behaviour.

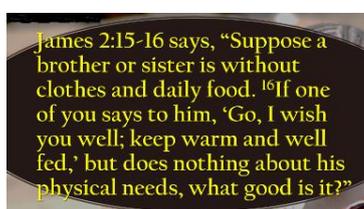
These figures do, however, point to the need for the church to evaluate its response to the presence of CSA in its midst and how it deals with the perpetrators.



Note: Interventions will be costly.



In Isaiah 58:7 God’s people are enjoined to, “share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe them...”



James 2:15-16 says, “Suppose a brother or sister is without clothes and daily food. <sup>16</sup>If one of you says to him, ‘Go, I wish you well; keep warm and well fed,’ but does nothing about his physical needs, what good is it?”

Thus, when we think of intervening in situations of child sexual abuse we need to be prepared that it will cost us our time, finances, and emotional and spiritual energy.

Sin is messy, and it is costly to clean up the mess. And yet that is what God calls us to do. And we must be committed to bearing the cost on behalf of those who have suffered trauma and abuse. And we must be prepared to bear the cost of dealing with those who have committed the sin of sexual abuse. It will not be easy, but it is what God calls us to do.

In our next session, we will be looking at how we can put into practice policies and procedures which will help us to keep our children safe as well as dealing with those who would commit sexual violence and abuse against our children.

## End Notes

<sup>i</sup> Executive summary to United Nations Children’s Fund Kenya Country Office, Division of Violence Prevention, National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Kenya National Bureau of Statistics, *Violence against Children in Kenya: Findings from a 2010 National Survey. Summary Report on the Prevalence of Sexual, Physical and Emotional Violence, Context of Sexual Violence, and Health and Behavioral Consequences of Violence Experienced in Childhood*. Nairobi, Kenya, 2012. 14, accessed June 25, 2016. [http://www.unicef.org/esaro/VAC\\_in\\_Kenya.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/esaro/VAC_in_Kenya.pdf).

<sup>ii</sup> Denis McCrann, An exploratory study of child sexual abuse in Tanzania. (Accessed November 2, 2018) 10-11, <https://arrow.dit.ie/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1080&context=appadoc>.

- <sup>iii</sup> Beth Swagman, *Preventing Child Abuse*, (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Faith Alive Christian Resources, 2003), 5.
- <sup>iv</sup> *The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, accessed December 16, 2015, <http://pages.au.int/sites/default/files/ACRWC-EN.pdf>.
- <sup>v</sup> *The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*, Article 4, Section 1.
- <sup>vi</sup> Thoko Kaime, *The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child: A social-legal perspective*. (Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press, 2009), 39-40, accessed November 17, 2015, [http://www.pulp.up.ac.za/pdf/2009\\_11/2009\\_11.pdf](http://www.pulp.up.ac.za/pdf/2009_11/2009_11.pdf).
- <sup>vii</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.
- <sup>viii</sup> Charles Ohene –Amoh, “The Uniqueness of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child,” 12. accessed December 17, 2015, [https://www.academia.edu/10017380/The\\_Uniqueness\\_of\\_the\\_African\\_Charter\\_on\\_the\\_Rights\\_and\\_Welfare\\_of\\_the\\_Child](https://www.academia.edu/10017380/The_Uniqueness_of_the_African_Charter_on_the_Rights_and_Welfare_of_the_Child).
- <sup>ix</sup> Minutes, Task Group On Sexual Abuse of Children, Sexual Abuse of Children: Public Hearings, 12 March 2002, accessed December 22, 2015, <https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/1246/>.
- <sup>x</sup> Linda M. Richter quoted in Cynthia Grant Bowman and Elizabeth Brundige, “Child Sex Abuse within the Family in Sub-Saharan Africa: Challenges and Change in Current Legal and Mental Health Responses,” *Cornell International Law Journal* 47, no. 2 (Spring 2014): 250, accessed December 23, 2015, <http://scholarship.law.cornell.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1841&context=cilj>.
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