

Police Arrest Amani Boss Over False Rape Report

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Harare

POLICE yesterday arrested one of the directors of Amani Trust who allegedly spearheaded a hate campaign against Zimbabwe by releasing a "grossly inaccurate" report claiming that hundreds of young girls and women in rural areas were being raped by Zanu-PF supporters.

The purported report was quoted in stories widely carried by the international media.

Dr Frances Lovemore was picked up yesterday afternoon from her offices in Harare and questioned over the media stories alleging that hundreds of girls and women were being raped in rural Zimbabwe.

Dr Lovemore was quoted by a South African newspaper and AFP as saying national youth brigades were "raping (girls and women) on a mass scale" because of their families' political views.

Chief police spokesman Assistant Commissioner Wayne Bvudzijena last night confirmed Dr Lovemore's arrest.

He said the police were now keen to interview Mr Tony Reeler, another director at Amani Trust, over the same stories.

Mr Reeler is believed to be currently out of the country.

He is alleged to have told the media that: "We are seeing an enormous prevalence of rape and enough cases to say it's being used by the State as a political tool."

Asst Comm Bvudzijena said the police would soon consider what charges to prefer against the two after going through the media stories attributed to them, including a CNN video clip.

The two are likely to be charged with breaching the Access to Information and Protection of Privacy Act.

The contentious stories claim that girls as young as 12 were being raped, tortured and forcibly kept as concubines in camps, which they branded as "systematic political cleansing of the population".

British newspapers, including the Sunday Telegraph, carried what they called an 'expose' of the mass rape written by one Christina Lamb, credited as a Foreign Correspondent of the Year.

In her story, Lamb claims to have carried out a month-long investigation in the Zambezi valley, Matabeleland and Manicaland where she "unearthed" the mass rape cases.

Amani Trust was quoted confirming the cases.

However, when contacted Dr Lovemore distanced herself from the stories saying the reporter had "blown everything out of proportion.

"The story has caused us a lot of distress. It was blown out of proportion and we have contacted the writer to make a retraction but like all journalists, she says she was standing by her story," said Dr Lovemore.

"The journalist was confused. She got the story from us but created a large story out of it which we don't really agree with."

She said the Trust had been working with victims of organised violence and torture since 1993 and had noted that over the past two years, there has been a rapid upsurge in organised violence and torture.

In a statement, she said: "Over the past three months 10 women have sought help from Amani after alleged rape because of their political affiliation."

The Trust said it was making a "factual video documentary" about experiences of the alleged rape victims, which would be made public on completion.

It is understood that the police have invited Amani to show them the alleged rape victims so as to verify the rape reports.

By early yesterday evening, the police were still quizzing Dr Lovemore but there was no indication on whether she would be detained overnight.