

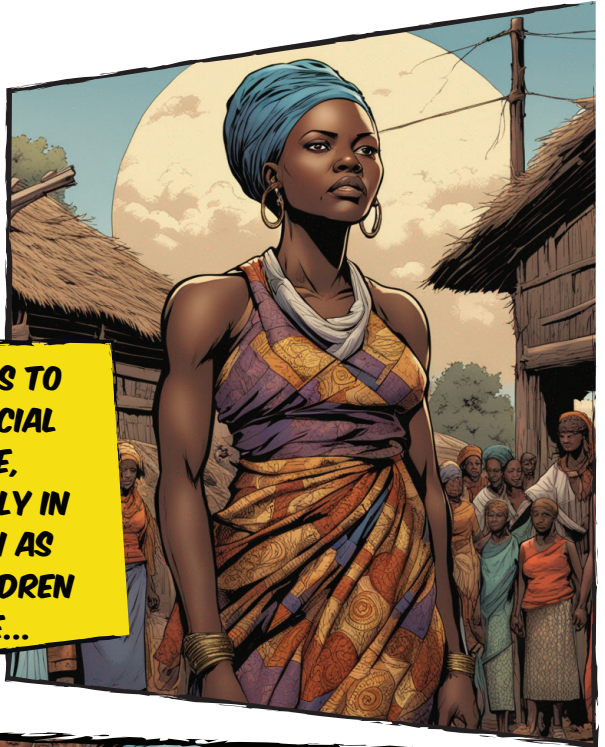
5.

THE STORY OF VERO NYAR VIHIGA

MY JOURNEY AS A HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER HAS NOT BEEN VERY SMOOTH...



...MY GOAL IS TO COMBAT SOCIAL INJUSTICE, PARTICULARLY IN CASES SUCH AS DEFILED CHILDREN AND RAPE...



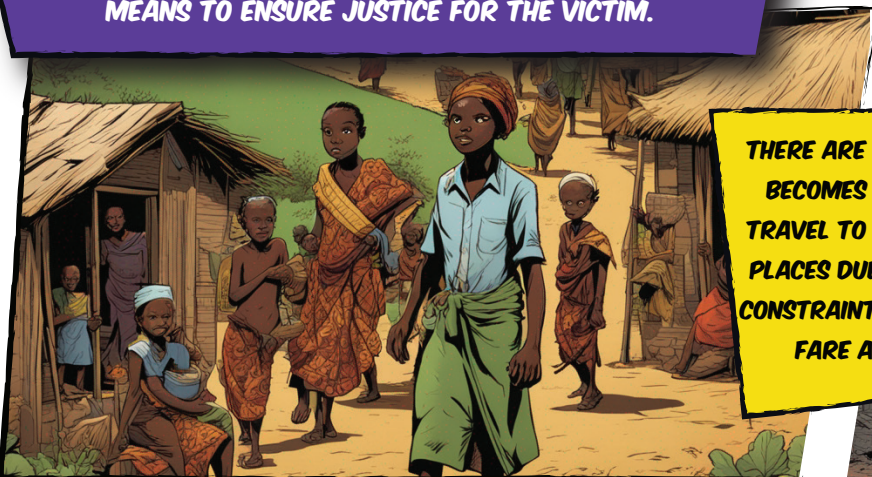
BUT IT'S NOT EASY. SOME TRADITIONAL BELIEFS STAND IN MY WAY.



THESE CULTURAL NORMS MAKE IT DIFFICULT TO ADVOCATE FOR JUSTICE, BUT THAT DOESN'T DETER ME FROM SEEKING THE TRUTH.



IT BECOMES CHALLENGING TO CONVINCE THE FAMILY THAT ISSUES LIKE INCEST SHOULD BE ADDRESSED THROUGH LEGAL MEANS TO ENSURE JUSTICE FOR THE VICTIM.



THERE ARE TIMES WHEN IT BECOMES DIFFICULT TO TRAVEL TO MORE DISTANT PLACES DUE TO FINANCIAL CONSTRAINTS, SUCH AS BUS FARE AND MEALS.



I SUGGESTED TO DEFENDERS COALITION THAT WE COULD GENERATE INCOME BY SELLING DETERGENT, THEREBY EMPOWERING OTHER WOMEN



THIS INITIATIVE PROVIDES US WITH AN ADDITIONAL SOURCE OF INCOME



DESPITE ENGAGING GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS THROUGH MEMORANDUMS, MEETINGS (BARAZA'S), AND PETITIONS, THEY OFTEN FAIL TO DELIVER ON THEIR PROMISES.



WHEN WORDS AREN'T ENOUGH, WE TAKE TO THE STREETS.

DEFENDERS COALITION PLAYS A CRUCIAL ROLE IN ENSURING OUR SAFETY, PREVENTING HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS FROM SPENDING THE NIGHT IN POLICE CUSTODY, AND PROVIDING TIMELY BAIL AND LEGAL SUPPORT.



WE RECENTLY ORGANIZED DEMONSTRATIONS ON 7/7, DURING THESE DEMONSTRATIONS, I WAS ARRESTED ALONG WITH MY COLLEAGUES. WITHIN TWO HOURS, DEFENDERS COALITION HAD ALREADY TAKEN STEPS TO SUPPORT US, PROVIDING BAIL MONEY, AND SECURING OUR RELEASE.




**WAPI ULE
MAMA WA
MAKELELE?**

I'VE ALSO LED DEMONSTRATIONS IN KAKAMEGA, AND THE POLICE THERE DID NOT WANT THE DEMONSTRATIONS TO PROCEED. THEY ATTEMPTED TO MINIMIZE OUR PRESENCE, AND SINCE I AM USUALLY THE LEAD, THEY OFTEN INQUIRE ABOUT ME, ASKING QUESTIONS LIKE, "WHERE IS THE ONE WHO LEADS THE CHANTS?"

IN OUR COMMUNITIES, MANY PEOPLE DO NOT LIKE TO WITNESS THE INJUSTICES THAT OCCUR BUT ARE OFTEN TOO FEARFUL TO COME FORWARD PUBLICLY. HOWEVER, A FEW APPROACH ME WITH THE INTENTION OF JOINING OUR TEAM BECAUSE THEY APPRECIATE THE WORK WE DO AS HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS. THIS IS ONE OF THE WAYS WE IMPACT SOCIETY AND THE COMMUNITY THROUGH OUR ACTIONS.



THROUGH THE DEFENDERS COALITION SUPPORT, INCLUDING SEMINARS, TRAINING, AND OTHER PROGRAMS, WE HAVE GAINED A WEALTH OF KNOWLEDGE. WHEN WE GIVE BACK TO SOCIETY, OUR EFFORTS ARE RECOGNIZED, AND PEOPLE LISTEN TO US, WILLING TO COLLABORATE WITH US. WE ARE EMPOWERED WITH VALUABLE INFORMATION ABOUT OUR RIGHTS, AS OUTLINED IN THE CONSTITUTION. I AM DEEPLY THANKFUL FOR ALL THE SUPPORT WE RECEIVE FROM DEFENDERS COALITION.



THE TALE OF VERO'S FIGHT FOR JUSTICE EMBODIES OUR VISION AT THE DEFENDER'S COALITION WHICH IS A JUST SOCIETY FOUNDED ON HUMAN RIGHTS.

WE ARE COMMITTED TO CHAMPION THE SAFETY, SECURITY AND WELLBEING OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS, THAT'S OUR MISSION.

HASNA ABDI, FROM WAJIR COUNTY, I WAS BORN, RAISED, AND BRED HERE. I WAS BORN IN A BUSH AWAY FROM THE PROPER HEALTH FACILITY, AND I COME FROM A BACKGROUND OF PASTORALISM. WE MOVED FROM ONE PLACE TO THE NEXT. I SURVIVED POLIO AT THE AGE OF THREE. MY FAMILY TOOK ME TO AN ITALIAN MISSIONARY IN WAJIR COUNTRY WHERE I GREW UP UNTIL I COMPLETED MY PRIMARY EDUCATION. I WAS REUNITED WITH MY FAMILY WHEN I STARTED MY SECONDARY EDUCATION.