



## Mandela Washington Fellowship Summit

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Leadership for the Future: Resilience and Inclusion

### Lusia Immanuel Ignite Talk Transcript

#### Speakers

- Lusia Immanuel, 2021 Mandela Washington Fellow, Namibia

#### Session Transcript

A couple of years ago, a close friend of mine knocked at my door at 4 AM one morning after a night out, sobbing uncontrollably, to tell me something that broke me apart to this date. It is a story similar to that of many women and girls of Namibia. It is a recollection of painful events that can never be erased. She was leaving a nightclub to catch a cab home when an unknown man approached her, grabbed her phone, and took off. As a reflex action, she ran after him. It was a trap. He overpowered her, dragged her to the side, and raped her under a thorn tree. She fought, she screamed, but the streets were empty.

Now, the questions asked by people as her story came out will shock you. A policewoman on duty, when my friend went to report her case, asked: "How does one get raped while wearing jeans?" Some people asked what she was thinking walking alone on the street at that hour. Some asked if she was drunk. Society wanted to make it her fault, but the reality in my country is gender-based violence takes place anywhere, anytime. Statistics provided at the end of 2020 show that over 33% of Namibian women have experienced sexual or physical abuse. Six percent have reported having experienced physical abuse during pregnancy. This clearly shows that abuse takes place at home as well.

Young girls are constantly raped by the men closest to them: their uncles, fathers, or grandfathers. And people know, but they won't tell because he is a person of status in the community; or because he is the breadwinner; or simply to save the marriage or the family. But what is a family with no love and trust? What is status with no respect?

Can one really call home the place where they are constantly abused? Namibian women are suffering in silence, and we do not deserve this. We deserve a place where we are respected and appreciated, a real haven, a safe home. And this is what I am working towards: building a place where women and girls can run to for protection to escape unsafe homes, to receive counseling and hope, to dream and believe again, but most importantly, to help them get justice.

Building on my Girls Club coaching experience, the gender activism I pour out through my social media platforms, and as a motivational speaker who has led gender-based violence protests, I am





now just organizing my team in order to fully establish this haven. Namibian Women and Girls Haven will be a place of hard work. An organization for women, by women, shaping dreams and building self-esteem, but also a training center for basic skills, food production, needlework, weaving, anything possible to keep the women going. The aim is to groom independent women stronger and better at everything they do. Namibian Women and Girls Haven: a place of hope.