

Nation & World

The Seattle Times

Priyanka Chopra dismayed by child sexual abuse in Zimbabwe

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1 of 2 | Actress Priyanka Chopra is photographed during an interview with the Associated Press in Johannesburg, Saturday, May 6, 2017. Chopra said after visiting Zimbabwe Friday as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador she is dismayed by the level of... (AP Photo/Denis Farrell) **More** ▾

By [STUART GRAHAM](#)

The Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Actress Priyanka Chopra says she is dismayed by the level of sexual violence against children in Zimbabwe, with government officials there telling her many young girls are “asking for it.”

Chopra spoke to The Associated Press on Saturday after visiting the southern African country as a UNICEF goodwill ambassador.

She said it was “an eye-opening experience” meeting girls who had been shunned by society and thrown out of their homes after being raped. She says girls are told it’s their fault.

“I heard a lot of this when I asked these government officials who said girls are asking for it,” she said. Some girls were as young as 3 when they were raped by their fathers, uncles or other relatives, she said.

One out of three children under 18 in Zimbabwe has suffered some form of sexual violence, she said, calling that “staggering.” In neighboring South Africa it’s one out of five, she said.

Chopra, who turned heads with her sweeping Ralph Lauren trench coat at Monday’s Met Gala in New York, said she feels it’s her duty to use her celebrity status to fight for worthy causes, especially violence against children.

“I am from India and I have seen wealth and poverty live together all my life,” she said. “That is the state of the world. That is our reality. It takes people like us who are privileged, who have everything that we may need in abundance, to be able to share it in parts of the world where they may not have that.”

Once-prosperous Zimbabwe has sunk into economic crisis over the years, with a cash crunch so severe that livestock in some cases is being accepted in lieu of currency. Unemployment is high, and the health and social services system has suffered.

Chopra, who stars in the upcoming “Baywatch” film, said she couldn’t get one Zimbabwe girl’s story out of her mind.

The girl told Chopra how she was raped by her uncle when she was 7. “The pastor of their church told her family that she was possessed and she should come and live with him ... but the pastor raped her for two years,” Chopra said.

“She was taken away from there and sent to another uncle and aunty of hers. The aunty then forced her to have sex with her husband, who was HIV positive. That was how she contracted HIV at age 17.” The girl tried to kill herself three times before she was rescued by a group that offered her psychological support, Chopra said.

The U.N. Population Fund calls Zimbabwe an “extremely young country,” with 62 percent of the population under 25.

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