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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Culture Is Not An Excuse For Rape**

July 28, 2009 - The National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA) is shocked and saddened by recent news reports of the sexual assault of an 8-year-old girl by four children in Arizona. SCESA is concerned that this crime is being viewed solely as a part of the victim's culture. In the United States, we are quick to think of sexual assault only occurring in low-income or racial/ethnic communities yet sexual assault is an alarming public health crisis that affects all communities regardless of race, culture, income or sexual orientation.

Our communities are outraged by what has happened to this little girl, but solely placing blame on her country of origin or race, is irresponsible and only serves to breed misdirected anger and misunderstandings, and adds to the anti-immigrant sentiments in this country. Further, when we focus on sexual assault as a problem of only certain cultures or race, we miss the very real issue that sexual assault is a public health concern fueled by societal constructs in all communities.

"We cannot allow culture to be used as a scapegoat for individual behavior. To blame the Liberian community for what this girl is going through is an outrage. Our primary concern should be supporting the victim, and instead of condemning the family and its culture we must seek opportunities to educate the family and all communities on the dynamics of sexual assault" says SCESA Executive Director, Condencia Brade.

The phenomenon of blaming the victim and concerns about shame for the family in the aftermath of a sexual assault is not exclusive to any one culture. In fact, it is a key reason why sexual assault remains the most under reported crime in this county and others. Unfortunately, though a complex dynamic, it is also not uncommon for parents (of any culture) to deny the rape of their child. Cases such as these remind us of the importance of culturally appropriate and relevant responses that take into consideration a victim's culture and the need for education of all communities, adults and families on the dynamic of sexual assault and the responsibility to protect those most vulnerable.

Further, we cannot overlook the importance of addressing the fact that the attackers were children themselves. The alarming reality is that sexual assault committed by young boys - especially perpetrators between the ages of 13 and 17 - is a growing concern in this country. We must seek opportunities to halt the messages that all youths are receiving about sex and violence.

The National Organization of Sisters of Color Ending Sexual Assault (SCESA) is a Women of Color-led nonprofit dedicated to working with our communities to create a just society in which Women of Color are able to live healthy lives free of violence.

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