

# CHEPTEGEI MEMORIAL RACE TARGETS GENDER VIOLENCE

PHOTO BY OLIVIA NAKATE

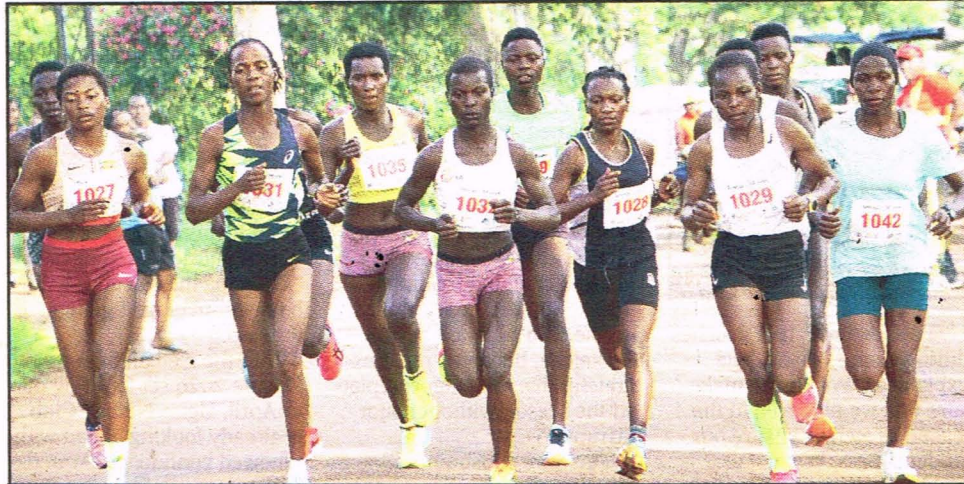
By Olivia Nakate

When Uganda's long-distance runner Rebecca Cheptegei died on September 5, 2024, her death shocked the athletics community and exposed a darker reality beyond medals and marathons.

Cheptegei, a promising marathon athlete, succumbed to severe burns after her alleged fiancé, Dickson Ndiema, reportedly set her ablaze.

Two years later, Uganda Athletics (UA) has placed the Rebecca Cheptegei Memorial Run on its 2026 calendar as an annual event meant not only to honour her sporting legacy, but also to confront the persistent threat of gender-based violence (GBV) within and beyond sport.

The run, organised by UA in partnership with Cheptegei's former management, will take place every September 5 the date of her death with this year's edition scheduled for Bukwo, her home area. Officials say the goal is remembrance and preven-



Female athletes taking part in the source of the Nile half marathon that was held in Jinja

tion: to celebrate Cheptegei's contribution to athletics while sending a public message that violence against female athletes must not be tolerated.

UA General Secretary Beatrice Ayikoru described the initiative as both symbolic and urgent. "We are partnering with her former management to ensure that this event is a success and to profile the

dangers that female athletes face, particularly gender-based violence," she said. "It is unfortunate that we have to put an event to remember when someone has passed. These are things we can be able to address before they happen."

While UA's move signals commitment, it also raises uncomfortable questions about what protections existed

before 2024 and whether they were enough.

Ayikoru has repeatedly expressed hope that Cheptegei's case would mark an end to such violence. "I said during her burial that I hope she would be the last, and it is my prayer that she is the last to have died through GBV," she reiterated. Investigations into violence against women

in sport reveals patterns of silence, fear of reporting, and limited support systems for athletes facing domestic or collaborative abuse.

The choice of Bukwo as the host venue adds another layer of meaning. It brings the memorial back to Cheptegei's roots, turning a site of grief into a platform for awareness. Organizers say the race will serve as a public forum to educate communities on GBV, encourage early reporting, and demand accountability from both sports bodies and society. Still, critics argue that symbolic races must be matched with concrete reforms: safeguarding policies, confidential reporting channels, counseling services, and collaboration with law enforcement and human rights groups. Without these, the memorial risks becoming a ritual of mourning rather than a tool of prevention.

Ayikoru noted that the safeguarding policy is designed to address such cases and expressed hope that both female

and male athletes will feel confident to speak up when they face hardships.

"Our role is to create awareness, which we will continue to do, but we also hope that athletes will report their challenges so that we can respond quickly and provide immediate support," Ayikoru said.

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