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Men called to action in NJ after alleged gang rape

By AARON MORRISON (AP) – 10 hours ago

TRENTON, N.J. — Dozens of men joined Trenton Mayor Doug Palmer and hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons in an impromptu march on Saturday through the neighborhood where police say a 7-year-old girl was gang-raped.

The march followed an afternoon rally organized to spur discussion about violence committed against and by young people in urban communities.

Near the end of the rally, the founder of an organization that uses men to help keep youth out of trouble recruited men to march. Dennis Muhammad also challenged the men to create a community policing program similar to the Peace Keepers organization he founded. The group has chapters in New York City, Jersey City, N.J., and Wilmington, Del.

Simmons said Peace Keepers has had some success in his hometown of Queens, N.Y.

"We sit back sometimes and allow just a few bad eggs in our community to scare us off our own corners," Simmons told a standing-room only crowd at a church auditorium before the march. "I stood on (the) corner. I sold drugs. But I went back and saw what it felt like when we launched our Queens peacekeepers movement."

The crowd also was stirred by speeches from local dignitaries and hip-hop gospel songs sang by a choir.

Palmer, who initially said he did not plan to attend the rally, arrived shortly after the event began.

"I think it's a good beginning," Palmer said as he, Simmons and dozens of Trenton men marched through the neighborhood exciting residents watching from their porches. "The proof will be if we can get more men together in this and other sustaining activities."

Several hundred people cheered as the men marched back to the church as newly committed peacekeepers. Muhammad said he hopes the men will serve as auxiliary police for a neighborhood that at times finds itself at odds with local law enforcement.

"You can't go into a community that loves itself and brutalize it," Muhammad said. "I believe it has always been the duty of men to protect his community, to protect the women."

The gathering was a welcomed sight for Trenton resident Dolores Davis, 46, who lives in the heart of the neighborhood that has caught the nation's attention.

"(People) need someone to tell them what is what," Davis said of the rally. "They need to see how the real world is and how we need to make a change."

Police say a 15-year-old girl took her 7-year-old stepsister to a party at crime-infested apartment tower two weeks ago and had sex with men for money. She then took money to let the men touch the younger girl, and the touching turned to forcible sex, according to police.

Although neighborhood residents say they have grown used to violence, reports of the gang-rape marked a turn for the worse.

The 15-year-old has been charged and is being held in a juvenile detention center. Two adults and three minors have been charged with the sexually assaulting the younger girl. One man had his first court appearance on Thursday, the other on Friday. The stepfather of the youngest girl said Thursday that the two men tried to help the child get out of the apartment, but did not dispute that someone had assaulted her.

Palmer met with the 7-year-old girl and her family and offered counseling and possible assistance if they wanted to relocate to another city.

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Hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons speaks to community members in Trenton, New Jersey, on Saturday April 10, 2010, angered by the alleged gang-rape of a 7-year-old New Jersey girl gathered for an anti-violence rally at a church just a few blocks away from the Rowan Towers apartment building. (AP Photo/ Joseph Kaczmarek)



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