

AWE — SOME

JOINT STATEMENT ON THE STATE OF HUMAN RIGHTS IN AFRICA

FIDA KENYA ON BEHALF AND AS A MEMBER OF THE AWESOME CONSORTIUM I.E. WOMEN CHALLENGED TO CHALLENGE(WCC), FORUM FOR WOMEN IN DEMOCRACY (FOWODE), SSIQQEE WOMEN IN DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION(SWDA), ETHIOPIA WOMEN WITH DISABILITY NATIONAL ASSOCIATION(EWDNA) AND WOMANKIND WORLDWIDE.

OBSERVER STATUS NUMBER (FIDA KENYA): 366

Introduction

As women's rights organizations in Africa, we reaffirm our commitment to promoting and protecting human rights in Africa. Acknowledging the progress made thus far, we nevertheless express our grave concern over the persisting challenges faced by individuals and communities across the continent. This joint statement seeks to address these concerns and call upon all Member States of the African Union to take immediate action to safeguard the fundamental human rights and dignity of all African women and girls.

We condemn any form of discrimination, violence, or abuse based on race, ethnicity, religion, gender, sexual orientation, or any other grounds. Such acts undermine the principles of equality, justice, and human rights in Africa. Many African countries continue to face the lack of respect for civil and political rights. Issues such as restrictions on freedom of expression, assembly, and association. Journalists, activists, and political opponents are often targeted, leading to a shrinking space for dissent and a stifling of democratic processes, the prevalence of human rights abuses, including torture, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary arrests. Security forces, both state and non-state actors, are often implicated in these violations, perpetuating a culture of impunity. This not only undermines the rule of law but also erodes public trust in institutions. In Uganda for example, the ongoing succession politics continues to grow with grave concerns on stability and progression of political rights for women and girls in all their diversities. Marginalized and vulnerable groups, such as women, children, ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ+ individuals, also continue to face discrimination

and violence. They are disproportionately affected by poverty, lack of access to education and healthcare, and social exclusion. Efforts to address these inequalities and protect their rights are vital for achieving inclusive and sustainable development in Africa. We call upon all AU (African Union) Member States to strengthen legislative and institutional frameworks to combat discrimination, promote equality, and prosecute those responsible for human rights violations.

We express concern over the lack of access to quality education and healthcare in many parts of Africa. We call upon Member States to prioritize investment in these sectors, eliminate barriers to education and healthcare services, and ensure the availability of these services to all individuals, without discrimination in the Africa region. We urge for the promotion of inclusive, equitable access to resources and sustainable development initiatives.

We express deep concern over the persistent violation of the rights of women and girls in Africa, including the prevalence of gender-based violence, child marriage, and female genital mutilation. The persistence of negative social and cultural norms in Africa, women and girls from the global south are affected by these norms that have been deeply ingrained in societies and are resistant to change. According to national statistics, vices such as child marriage, forced marriage and GBV (Gender Based Violence) persist due to tradition and cultural preservation, limited access to education and information, gender inequality as a significant issue in many African societies, with women often experiencing discrimination and subjugation. Social pressure and conformity, poverty, and economic constraints where for example, child labour and early marriage can be seen as economic solutions or survival strategies for families living in poverty. Although, awareness campaigns, and advocacy organizations are working to shift societal attitudes and empower individuals to challenge harmful practices, there is a risk that culture may win over civilization and order, thus undoing all progress made in the women's rights advocacy journey. We urge all AU Member States to enact and enforce legislation that protects women's rights, strengthen access to justice, and enhance gender equality by empowering women.

In 2022, efforts have been made to document the prevalence of disabilities through surveys and national censuses across the focus countries of Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda. However, clear, and reliable data trends are not apparent because of variations in the definition of disability used which may have resulted in over- or under-reporting. Moreover, prevalence is complicated by misconceptions about disability, lack of consistent data collection strategies across all regions of the country (especially rural areas) and the unwillingness of families to reveal information about their children and family members during data collection.

The intersection of poverty, disability and gender increases the exposure to gender-based violence. Girls and women with disabilities are vulnerable to sexual violence precisely because of the difficulty they face to hear, understand, communicate, see, or defend themselves. Difficulties are also posed by society and by their environment. Certain attitudes and lack of knowledge in the communities can lead to risky situations for girls and women with disabilities.

We are dismayed at the prevalence of human rights abuses, including torture, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary arrests. Security forces, both state and non-state actors, are often implicated in these violations, perpetuating a culture of impunity. This not only undermines the rule of law but also erodes public trust in institutions. Malpractice dominated elections, impunity among government leaders, and graft have led to decreasing interest by citizens to participate in electoral processes and civic organizing. Without active citizen involvement, we are likely to see further slippage in

accountable governance, which in turn affects gender responsive service delivery. We emphasize the importance of protecting the rights of all citizens including the marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and refugees and internally displaced persons.

Over the years, stringent legislation continues to affect CSO (Civil society organizations) organizing in Africa. Many African countries have strict laws that require CSOs (Civil society organizations) (Civil society organizations) to register with government authorities to operate legally or have imposed restrictions on CSOs receiving funding from foreign sources. This compounded with civil strife and humanitarian issues in countries like Ethiopia continues to put at risk the lives, livelihoods and rights of all women and girls in their diversities. In Uganda, The Public Order Management Act (POMA) continues to restrict CSO ability to organize citizens for public cause.

We acknowledge that progress has been made in some countries. Several African nations have taken steps to strengthen their legal frameworks, establish human rights institutions, and ratify international human rights treaties. Civil society organizations and human rights defenders play a crucial role in advocating for change and holding governments accountable. However, more needs to be done to ensure the full realization of human rights in Africa. Governments must prioritize the protection of human rights, promote good governance, and strengthen the independence of the judiciary. International cooperation and support are also essential in addressing systemic challenges and fostering a culture of respect for human rights across the continent.

Summarily, and as a consortium we make the following Call to Action to African states including Uganda, Ethiopia, and Kenya;

We call upon all AU Member States to cooperate fully with international human rights mechanisms, including granting unrestricted access to independent monitoring bodies, to investigate and address human rights violations. We support capacity-building efforts that strengthen national human rights institutions and civil society organizations to promote and protect human rights effectively.

We emphasize the importance of protecting the rights of all citizens including marginalised groups including indigenous persons, persons with disabilities, refugees, and internally displaced persons.

Persons living with disability continue to be left behind in key policy discourse and spaces across the continent which contributes to heightened and persistent violations of their human rights. **We therefore demand**, the entrenchment of intersectional approaches within policymaking under various AU bodies to ensure marginalised and minority movement holders are not left behind.

We thus urge all African governments to adopt measures that guarantee their full participation in social, economic, cultural, and political life - while safeguarding the collective rights of their citizenry including women and girls in all their diversities and addressing their specific needs. We emphasize the importance of protecting the rights of all citizens including the marginalized groups, including indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and refugees and internally displaced persons.

Further we urge the member states represented here and more so the governments of Kenya, Uganda, and Ethiopia to adopt and implement the following human rights normative and legal principles;

- a. **Recognition and Adoption** of the ILO (International Labour Organization) 190 Convention by Kenya and Ethiopia. The ILO 190 Convention is an international labour standard adopted by the International Labour Organization (ILO) on June 21, 2019. The convention addresses the issue of violence and harassment in the world of work and aims to provide a safe and respectful working environment for all. We take note and congratulate Uganda for its most recent ratification of the convention.

We call for its ratification and adoption across the continent and more so in Kenya and Uganda to address and advocate for the elimination of VAWG (Violence Against Women and Girls) and address various spaces it manifests including the political sphere and relevant processes. Ratification will further entrench worker's rights including women and girls ensuring safety at work, bargaining power, and a rights-based approach on accountability of employers to the safety of their worker with due regard to sexual harassment.

- b. **Equal Participation:** From the local to the global level, meaningful and equal women's leadership and political participation is realised:

We call for the entrenchment and recognition of Women's rights to Participation and Leadership. Women in leadership champion and catalyse issues of gender equality, such as the elimination of gender-based violence, promoting parental leave and childcare, pensions, gender-equality laws, and electoral reform, gender mainstreaming in governance.

Specifically, increasing and advocating for WPL (Women's Participation & Leadership) (Women's Participation & Leadership) (Women's Participation & Leadership) plays a key role in the effective implementation and necessary acceleration in African Union Gender Strategy action to emerging challenges toward the achievement of the laid-out goals with due regard to gender equality. In implementing country-specific municipal gender strategies, states will pursue an active coordination and partnership approach with organisations and coalitions, working to achieve the goals of the African Charter on People and Human Rights, CEDAW and its Optional Protocol, the Maputo Protocol and best practices at the global stage that have been anchored in the Istanbul Convention (Europe) and the Belem do Para Convention (OAS).

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