



Statement by Alliances for Africa at the

66th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

Observer Status Number 235

Honorable Chairperson of the ACHPR,

Alliances for Africa is an international African led non-governmental human rights, peace and sustainable development organization. AfA works with partners in, around and beyond the continent of Africa. Alliances for Africa is a member of the Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR), a coalition of over 50 organizations working on women's rights in 27 countries in Africa. SOAWR was formed with the principal objective of advocating for the ratification, domestication and implementation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), which was adopted 17 years ago.

Honorable Chairperson, Alliances for Africa and SOAWR congratulate the four new commissioners and look forward to working closely with them, moreso with Commissioner Kayitesi Zainabo Sylvie, the new Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa.

Honorable Chairperson, the ongoing COVID-19 crisis has created unprecedented challenges for women and girls' rights including an increase in sexual and physical violence, an increased risk of exposure to harmful cultural practices such as forced child marriage and female genital mutilation, and a higher risk of deprivation of social and economic rights such as the right to education, the highest attainable standard of health, and right to adequate food, shelter and other basic needs. Under specific provisions of the Maputo Protocol, the COVID-19 pandemic poses a grave risk to the rights of African women and girls to live a life free of violence; to live in peace and free of armed conflict; women and girls' social and economic rights; right to health including reproductive health; and the right to food security. It is important to note that women in distress including poor women, women heads of households and elderly women are at higher risk of the enhanced vulnerabilities mentioned in the foregoing. Times of crises such as this are an opportunity to build up on existing systems and design new approaches to guarantee the rights of women and girls in Africa. **We urge the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, in concert with government and civil society, to collaborate on ways of safeguarding, improving and enhancing women's and girls' rights protection during the COVID-19 crisis. In particular, we call on the African**

Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to stress the need for the full ratification, domestication and implementation of the Maputo Protocol as one of the legal and political interventions aimed at addressing the effect of the COVID-19 crisis on the rights of women and girls in Africa. Further, we call on the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, through its special mandates and mechanisms, particularly the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, to develop and release guidelines and principles on how states can continue to guarantee the rights of women and girls in Africa during this crisis.

Honorable Chairperson, Women Human Rights Defenders, continue to face overwhelming challenges arising from pre-existing gender inequalities that have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. We wish to draw the Commission's attention and urge for its expedient action on the situation in Zimbabwe, where three women rights defenders were arrested following a peaceful protest demonstrating the government of Zimbabwe's failure to address hunger facing vulnerable communities amidst the COVID-19 pandemic. They were held incommunicado for 36 hours during which time they underwent torture, rape and physical assault. Although they were eventually released on bail, the violence against them has yet to be properly investigated, they still need proper medical attention for their injuries, and they still face charges.

Honorable Chairperson, African governments have adopted various measures to address the COVID-19 pandemic. However, the response measures imposed put women and girls at increased risk of violence and abuse. In Africa, one in every three women has experienced gender-based violence. Since the start of the pandemic, the number of reported cases of gender-based violence, domestic violence, and sexual offenses has increased in many African countries. **We urge the African Commission to impress upon member states the need to adopt appropriate and effective measures that are gender-sensitive and gender-responsive in order to ensure the protection of women's and girls' rights.**

Honorable Chairperson, African Union member states committed to achieve universal ratification of the Maputo Protocol by 2020. Regrettably, to date, 13 AU member states are yet to ratify the Maputo Protocol. **We urge the remaining 13 AU member states – Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan – to urgently ratify the Maputo Protocol in order to ensure that the women and girls in these countries enjoy their rights as enshrined in the Protocol.**

Honorable Chairperson, we note the improved number of States reporting on the Maputo Protocol and commend the Commission for its continued efforts towards building the capacity of states to report on the Maputo Protocol, in line with the State Reporting Guidelines issued by the Commission. **SOAWR urges AU member states to domesticate and implement the Protocol at the domestic levels. Further, we call on AU member states to comply with decisions rendered by the ACHPR.**

We continue to urge that the Commissioners remains seized of the need to promote and protect the independence of the Commission, especially during these times when health, economic, and political

challenges occasioned by the COVID-19 crisis call for much needed leadership in crafting a continental human rights approach to address emerging and lingering challenges and opportunities.

Last but not least, we would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the Commission on holding this first-ever virtual session and to assure you of our collaboration in your continued service to the cause of human rights on the Continent.

I thank you.

Done in Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria on 15 July 2020

The SOAWR Coalition is comprised of:

1. Action for Development (ACFODE)
2. African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)
3. African Women's Development Fund
4. African Women's Development and Communication Network (FEMNET)
5. Akina Mama wa Afrika
6. Alliances for Africa
7. Association des Juristes Maliennes (AJM)
8. Association des Juristes Sénégalaises
9. Association of Egyptian Female Lawyers (AEFL)
10. BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights
11. Cellule de Coordination sur les Pratiques Traditionnelle Affectant la Sante des Femmes et des Enfants (CPTAFE)
12. Center for Health Human Rights and Development (CEHURD)
13. Center for Human Rights – University of Pretoria
14. Center for Reproductive Rights
15. Centre for Justice Studies and Innovation (CJSI)
16. Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation (CSVR)
17. Coalition on Violence Against Women
18. Collectif des Associations et ONGs Féminines du Burundi
19. Eastern African Sub-regional Support Initiative
20. Equality Now
21. Fahamu Networks for Social Justice
22. Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya
23. Forum Mulher
24. Girl Child Network
25. Great Lakes Initiative for Human Rights and Development (GLIHD)
26. Human Rights Law Service (HURILAWS)
27. ICJ Kenya
28. Inter-African Committee (IAC) on Harmful Traditional Practices
29. Inter-African Network for Women, Media, Gender Equity and Development (FAMEDEV)
30. Ipas Africa Alliance for Women's Reproductive Health and Rights
31. KADIRAT
32. Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC)

33. Make Every Woman Count
34. Malawi Human Rights Resource Centre/ NGOGCN
35. NAFGEM Tanzania
36. NGO Gender Coordination Network
37. Oxfam GB
38. People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA)
39. Question de Femmes
40. Reproductive Health and Rights Alliance
41. Sister Namibia
42. STEWARD Women
43. Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA)
44. Tomorrow's Child Initiative
45. Tshwaranang Legal Advocacy Centre (TLAC)
46. Uganda Women Network (UWONET)
47. Union Nationale Des Femmes Djiboutiennes
48. Voix de Femmes
49. WANET
50. WLSA ZAMBIA
51. Women in Law and Development in Africa
52. Women NGO Secretariat of Liberia
53. Women of Liberia Peace Network
54. Women's Advocacy and Communication Network
55. Women's Counselling and Information Centre (WCIC)
56. Women's Rights Advancement & Protection Alternative (WRAPA)
57. Young Liberian Women Organization For Improvement (WOFIM)