



Campaign for the fulfilment of women's human rights in Africa

## CAMPAIGN DECLARATION

*WE*, the undersigned national, regional and international human rights and women's rights organisations, present throughout Africa

### **CONCERNED BY:**

- **Persistent widespread discrimination and violence against women:** In the majority of African countries discrimination remains rooted in law and practice: women are denied equal rights to inheritance, property, custody and guardianship of children, and are subjugated to their husbands. Women have unequal and limited access to education, health, justice and public affairs.

Violence continues to be perpetrated against women in both the public and private spheres. Across the continent women continue to suffer domestic and sexual violence, harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, widowhood rites, wife inheritance, forced and early marriage. In a number of countries recent escalation of political violence has particularly targeted women. In times of armed conflict, women are often the first victims, with sexual violence used as a weapon of war.

- **Weak adherence to international and regional women's human rights protection instruments:** International law requires states to take all necessary measures to end discrimination and ensure respect for women's human rights. However, whilst almost all African states have ratified the Convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (CEDAW), 8 states have entered reservations to this Convention, which undermine the very principle of non-discrimination; and 35 states have

not ratified its Optional Protocol, which allows individual women to seek redress for violations. Further, 5 years after its adoption, 28 states have still not ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa.

- **The failure of states to make the necessary legal and political reforms to end violations of women's human rights:** Even states that have adhered to these instruments have so far failed to take the measures required to ensure their implementation. States continue to maintain laws that expressly or indirectly discriminate against women and fail to adopt legislation and policies to protect women from violence and discrimination. Where such laws do exist, violations often go unpunished and impunity prevails. Insufficient efforts are made to raise awareness on women's human rights and to guarantee access to independent and impartial justice. Many states do not even comply with the obligation to submit periodic reports on the implementation of international and regional instruments, reflecting a serious lack of commitment to protect and promote women's human rights.

### **RECOGNISING:**

- **The need for mobilisation:** All civil society organisations, both human rights NGOs and women's rights organisations, need to work together to combat discrimination and violence against women, which harm entire societies and future generations.

**REITERATE** that national governments have the primary responsibility of ensuring respect for women's human rights. Culture, tradition and religion cannot be invoked as justifications for violations of women's human rights. The elimination of discrimination and violence against women is above all a matter of political will.

**HEREBY** launch a Campaign to mobilise all African and international actors for the realisation of gender equality and women's human rights in Africa.

**CALL UPON** African states to take all necessary measures to ensure respect for women's human rights, including civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights, and in particular to:

- Ratify without reservations the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, CEDAW and the Optional Protocol to CEDAW;
- Bring national legislation in conformity with the provisions of international and regional women's human rights protection instruments, by abolishing discriminatory laws and adopting laws to protect women's human rights;
- Put in place all necessary measures to ensure the effective application of these laws.

**CALL UPON** all national, regional and international actors to join the Campaign so that, together, we can achieve gender equality and full respect of women's human rights.

Join our campaign by signing the Campaign Declaration:  
[www.africa4womensrights.org](http://www.africa4womensrights.org)



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International Federation for Human Rights

