Press Kit

8 March 2009:
Launch of a Campaign to end discrimination and violence against women in Africa
Africa for Women’s Rights

«Ratify and Respect»

The year 2009 marks the 30th anniversary of the adoption of the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) by the United Nations General Assembly. Whilst the majority of African states have

« My constant struggle for justice brings me today to lend my full support to this important initiative. I stand beside all those calling for equality and an end to violence and discrimination against women in Africa.»

Shirin Ebadi, Nobel Peace Prize Laureate 2003, Campaign Patron

On 8 March 2009, over 100 human rights and women’s rights organisations across the African continent are launching a Campaign to end to discrimination and violence against women in Africa.

The Campaign was initiated by FIDH and 5 non-governmental regional human rights and women’s rights organisations: The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF) and Women and Law in South Africa (WLSA) and Women’s Aid Collective (WACOL).

These organisations compose the Campaign Steering Committee responsible for coordinating the Campaign.


The Campaign blog:

www.africa4womensrights.org

a key tool in the Campaign

The blog, with information in English and French, is animated by the organisations participating in the Campaign across Africa.

You will find the Campaign Declaration, to be signed online, regularly updated information on women’s rights in Africa and details of the Campaign actions undertaken across Africa and elsewhere:

An interactive map – which shows at a glance which states have committed themselves at the international level to respecting women’s human rights (by ratifying CEDAW, its Optional Protocol and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa).

The Campaign tools – documents, logos, posters – can be accessed and downloaded.

The Campaign agenda – with details of Campaign actions.

http://www.africa4womensrights.org/fr
ratified this Convention, violations of women’s human rights persist across the continent. Despite some positive reforms of law and practice in some African states, there is still a long way to go to combat violence and discrimination against women.

Why this Campaign?
In the majority of African countries, discrimination remains rooted in law and in 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.

Tanzania: testimony from a woman who formerly carried out female circumcision
«We talk about female circumcision, we talk about AIDS, how to bring up children, that they should be equal. You see, we discriminate between children. Boys should also carry out household chores. At the moment girls don’t have any rights. When they are little they obey their fathers, once they are married they obey their husbands... If you have a field for example, you can’t give it to your daughter, only boys can inherit property»

Testimony from the documentary “Ni Mila Tu”, directed by Charlotte Bruneau and Laurène Lepeytre (2009)

The key moments of the Campaign in 2009
-8 March 2009: The Campaign will be launched on 8 March 2009, International Women’s Day. Events (marches, rallies, debates, press conferences) will take place across Africa.
-June 2009: Regional public event. Concert in support of the Campaign.
-July 2009: Publication of the “Dossier of Claims and Concerns”.
This document is the fruit of investigations conducted by national NGOs in their countries. It brings together the principal violations and the main recommendations to improve respect for women’s human rights in 40 African countries. It will be a major advocacy tool to call on governments to implement reforms.
-25 November -10 December 2009: Actions will be organised across the continent to raise awareness, mobilise civil society and put pressure on governments: demonstrations, concerts, petitions etc.
Strengthening respect for women’s human rights requires reform of the legal framework. The fulfillment of women’s human rights is dependent on the political will of governments to RATIFY international and regional instruments for the protection of women’s human rights and to RESPECT their international obligations, by reforming national laws and taking all necessary steps to ensure their implementation.

The major women’s rights protection instruments

The UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1979, is the international instrument of reference on women’s rights. The Convention sets out states’ obligations to put an end to discrimination against women, in the public and private spheres, and to promote equality, including by eliminating prejudice and stereotypes concerning the roles of women and men in society. A UN Committee monitors the implementation of the Convention.

The Optional Protocol to CEDAW, adopted in 1999, enables women victims of violations, who are unable to obtain justice at the national level, to bring their case before an international body.

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.

CEDAW: a tool for change

Numerous struggles have already been fought and won on the basis of the CEDAW Convention. In Senegal and Burkina Faso, female genital mutilation has been progressively abandoned. In Benin, laws have been reformed in favour of women’s rights. In Mali, a new Family Code, with fewer discriminatory provisions, is about to be adopted. But these are timid signs of progress and, across the continent, laws discriminating against women remain widespread. Only two states, Cape verde and South Africa, can claim to have laws which truly reflect equality between the sexes.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, adopted in 2003 following a hard-fought battle led by African women’s rights organisations, obliges states to guarantee women’s fundamental human rights. Several of the rights and obligations set out in this instrument are particularly relevant to the African context, such as the provision concerning the prohibition against traditional harmful practices and the specific obligation to protect women during situations of armed conflict. The Protocol also contains provisions concerning reproductive rights.

6 years after its adoption, 28 states have still not ratified the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa.
The Campaign's Objectives: “From advocacy... to law... to reality”
The goals of this Campaign are to obtain concrete commitments at the international level, legal reforms at the national level and the demonstration of political will by all governments to ensure such reforms are respected. All the states of the continent are targeted by this initiative.

The ultimate goal of this Campaign is to put an end to violence and discrimination against women in Africa.

If the mobilisation around this campaign is significant enough to exert real pressure on governments, leading them to ratify international and regional instruments protecting women’s human rights, to abolish discriminatory laws and customs, to adopt legislation protecting women from violence and discrimination and to take all the necessary steps to ensure their effective implementation, the life of women in Africa will change.

This Campaign is not going to prevent rapes from being committed, female circumcision being practised or immediately change entrenched stereotypes about the role of the women in societies. However, if laws are adopted and implemented to sanction violence and to guarantee women equal status to men, these practices will be punished, perpetrators prosecuted and women will no longer be treated as inferior to their brothers or husbands, or marginalised in the public domain.

It is only by achieving equality before the law, that practices will change and mindsets will evolve towards respect for women’s human rights.

The Campaign’s Appeals

WE CALL UPON African states to ratify international and regional women’s right protection instruments without reservation.

WE CALL UPON African states to bring national legislation in conformity with the provisions of international and regional women’s human rights protection instruments, to abolish discriminatory laws and adopt laws for the protection of women’s human rights.

WE CALL UPON African states to put in place all necessary measures to ensure the effective application of these laws.

WE 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.
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
International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)
www.fidh.org and http://blog.gardonslesyeuxouverts.org/

Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS)
www.fasngo.org

The African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)
www.acdhrs.org

Women’s Aid Collective (WACOL)
www.wacolnigeria.org

Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF)
www.wildaf.org

Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA)
www.wlsa.org.zm

All information on the Campaign is available on the blog:
www.africa4womensrights.org