AFRICA FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS

RATIFY & RESPECT !

Press Kit

www.africa4womensrights.org

First anniversary of the Campaign, **the struggle continues!**

Souhayr Belhassen
President of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

On 8 March 2010, the Campaign "Africa for Women's Rights: Ratify and Respect!" will mark its first anniversary. Petitions, marches, meetings with governments, workshops... Campaign activities were organised in some forty African countries. The impact of these activities was an illustration of the strength of such collective mobilisation. Positive developments included Guinea-Bissau's ratification of the Optional Protocol to CEDAW, the adoption of a law on quotas for women's representation on electoral lists in Burkina Faso, the adoption of a law prohibiting female genital mutilation in Uganda and the nomination of a Special Representative to the United Nations Secretary General on Sexual Violence in Conflict.

Inequalities

This mobilisation is crucial: in addition to violations of physical integrity - female genital mutilation, domestic violence and rape used as a weapon of war -, inequalities before the law (in marriage, custody of children, access to inheritance and land etc...) affect the lives of millions of African women and girls.

Some struggles have already brought results, leading for example, to a progressive reduction of female genital mutilation in several countries (Senegal, Niger) and in others, such as Benin, to the reform of legislation to eliminate provisions discriminating against women. However, progress remains limited, and in some countries there have been significant setbacks, such as Mali, where in August 2009 the enactment of legislation abolishing some aspects of discrimination in the family was stalled. To date, only two states (South Africa and Cape Verde) can boast a system of national laws guaranteeing equality between the sexes.

Commitment

It is political will that is lacking today to guarantee the effective protection of women's rights on the continent. Ceaseless action and determination is required on the part of civil society to alert their governments to violations of women's human rights and persuade them to take concrete action. This is the objective of the Campaign and we invite all those - men and women - who share our common ambition for the respect of women's rights in Africa and are convinced of the urgent necessity to end violence and discrimination, to join us.

> *"I call upon all leaders to promote and protect equal rights for women and girls. Violence against women cannot be tolerated in any form, any context, in any circumstances by any religious leader, political leader or by any government. As people of faith and concerned global citizens, we cannot embrace justice, peace and love if we fear to speak out, condemning violence against women as wrong.(...) A society that permits violence against women is a society that is on the way out."*

Desmond Tutu, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, Campaign Patron
Speech made on the occasion of the International day for the elimination of Violence Against women, November 2009.

> *"During the course of my travels, I have had the opportunity to meet many women, some victims of violence, injustice or discrimination. I have said it and will continue to do so, women are the backbone of our continent. Women's rights are human rights and all women should be considered equal to men.*
>
> *I have been supporting the campaign "Africa for women's rights: ratify and respect" since 2009. I have followed the few positive developments that occurred, over this year, regarding the situation of women in Africa. But they remain woefully insufficient and there are so many more struggles to fight. All the fundamental rights of women, including access to effective healthcare, to their own property and land, the right to speak out and to go to school, to have access to and be represented in every sector of society, these rights must be reflected in national laws and those laws must be properly implemented. It is only by mobilising together that our combat will grow stronger and we will achieve progress."*

Angélique Kidjo, Artist, Campaign Patron

Why this campaign?

AFRICA FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS
RATIFY & RESPECT!

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.

Yet, the tools to end such discrimination exist. Most countries have ratified the international instruments on the protection of women's rights, in particular, the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW). In the framework of this Campaign, across the continent, African citizens – women and men - are mobilising to urge their governments to RATIFY these texts and to RESPECT them in law and practice.

CEDAW

The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women, adopted by the United Nations 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 stereotypes concerning the roles of women and men in society.

A UN Committee monitors the implementation of the Convention by states (CEDAW Committee).

Whilst almost all African states have ratified CEDAW, 8 states have entered reservations to this Convention, which undermine the very principle of non-discrimination; and 34 states have not ratified its Optional Protocol, which allows individual women to seek redress for violations before an international body.

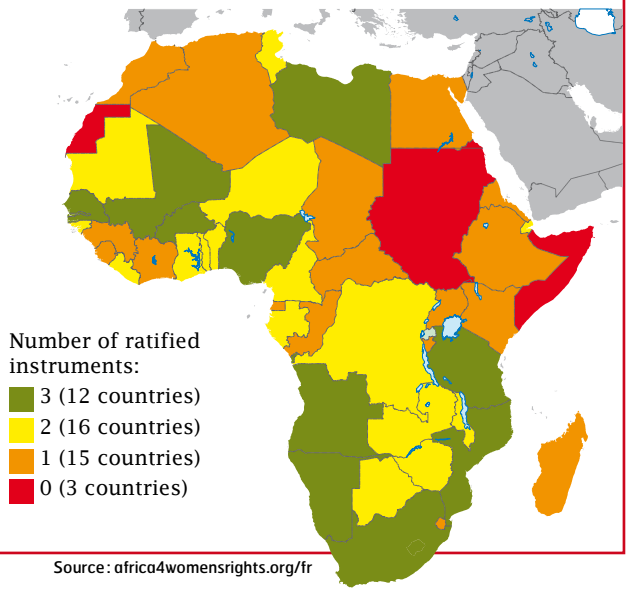
RATIFICATION MAP

The main regional and international instruments for the protection of women's rights are:

- The UN Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW)
- The Optional Protocol to CEDAW
- The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)

The Coalition of the Campaign calls upon African states to demonstrate their commitment to women's rights by ratifying these three key instruments.

CURRENT STATE OF RATIFICATIONS OF THESE INSTRUMENTS BY COUNTRY



Source: africa4womensrights.org/fr

The Dossier of Claims

The Dossier of Claims is the **outcome of investigations** conducted by national human rights and women's rights organizations in their respective countries and reflects the situation of women's rights in over thirty African countries. It contains key demands to eliminate discrimination and violence against women. These "claims" are directed towards national governments, since strengthening respect of women's rights is primarily a question of political will.

Progress and obstacles

The Dossier is composed of a series of notes, detailing the main violations of women's rights in each country. Each note underlines – where they exist – any positive measures that have been taken over recent years, and identifies the main obstacles to respect of women's rights in law and practice.

In addition to its informative and awareness-raising functions, this Dossier constitutes an important advocacy tool at the disposal of all those involved in campaigning for women's rights. The claims formulated in the Dossier will be brought to the attention of the competent authorities at the national, regional and international levels. The Dossier is also a tool for all those whose aim is to achieve full equality between men and women, an essential condition for the fulfillment of universal human rights.

The Dossier of Claims will be published to mark International Women's Day, 8 March 2010

For further information, visit the Campaign blog:
www.africa4womensrights.org

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L'AFRIQUE POUR LES DROITS DES FEMMES
RATIFIER & RESPECTER!
RATIFY & RESPECT!

The blog, with information in English and French, is maintained 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.

Join our facebook group :
Africa for Women's Rights – Ratify and Respect!

The Key Claims of the Campaign

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
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.

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Civil Society Mobilisation

The Campaign launch in Kinshasa

Democratic Republic of Congo

Over the past year, the Campaign partner organisations in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) have undertaken numerous actions to raise awareness on the Campaign.

LAUNCH OF THE CAMPAIGN...

Kinshasa

In Kinshasa in March 2009, the Campaign partners (*Association africaine des droits de l'Homme* (ASADHO), *Ligue des électeurs and Ligue des femmes pour le développement et l'éducation à la démocracie* (LIFDED)) organised awareness-raising actions in public spaces including schools and churches. More than 2000 people were involved in these activities.

Kisangani

The Campaign partner organisation in Kisangani, *Groupe Lotus*, organised marches in the streets to raise awareness on the Campaign. In parallel, a debate was organised involving other local women's rights organisations, drawing attention to the failure of the DRC government to ensure respect of the international and regional women's rights protection instruments that it has ratified. The *Groupe Lotus* also participated in three radio talk-shows, calling on the Government to respect and promote women's rights in legislation.

MEETINGS WITH THE DRC GOVERNMENT

In July 2009, FIDH President, Souhayr Belhassen, accompanied the Campaign partner organisations in meetings with the authorities to present the objectives of the campaign and key recommendations to ensure respect for women's rights.

AFRICAN WOMEN'S DAY

Kinshasa, Kisangani

To mark African Women's Day on 31 July 2009, the partner organisations held a press conference in Kinshasa, bringing together civil society organisations and numerous press agencies, during which the objectives of the campaign were underlined. The Groupe Lotus intervened on a radio talk show on radio Okapi in an effort to mobilise civil society around the Campaign's message.

Conference in Kinshasa

Burkina Faso

CONTEXT

The representation of women in political life in Burkina Faso is particularly low. Of 111 seats in Parliament, only 17 are held by women (15%). Over many months, civil society advocated for the adoption of a law establishing quotas for the representation of women in political bodies.

ADVOCACY ACTIONS

In February 2009, Souhayr Belhassen, FIDH President met with the Campaign partner organisations in Burkina Faso: the *Mouvement Burkinabé des droits de l'Homme et des Peuples* (MBDHP), WILDAF-Burkina Faso and the *Réseau de communication d'information et de formation des femmes dans les ONG* (RECIF/ONG – BF). This was an opportunity to discuss the difficulties with which women in Burkina Faso are confronted, including domestic violence, discrimination and under-representation in political life.

Following this meeting, Souhayr Belhassen took the demands of local NGOs to the President of the National Assembly, then to the President of Burkina Faso, Blaise Compaoré, advocating for the adoption of legislative measures to end gender discrimination.

PROGRESS:
the adoption of the law establishing quotas for women on electoral lists

One of the outcomes of months of mobilisation of human rights and women's rights organisations against all forms of discrimination against women was the adoption of a law establishing quotas for representation of women in politics. This law represents a first step towards equal representation in political life, requiring a minimum of 30% women on the list of candidates presented by each political party. Those parties that do not adhere to the quota will see their funding cut.

The Campaign Steering Comittee

International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH)

FIDH is a federation of 155 national human rights organisations. FIDH's core mandate is to fight violations of all human rights – civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights – and to hold perpetrators of violations accountable. FIDH's members are independent of all political or religious affiliation. They act within their respective countries to protect fundamental human rights and freedoms. FIDH supports its member organisations at the local, regional and international levels.

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African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS)

Established in 1989, the Centre's main objective is to give meaning to Article 25 of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, which requires States Parties to, "promote and ensure, through teaching, education and publication, respect of the rights and freedoms contained in the Charter and to see to it that these freedoms and rights, as well as corresponding obligations are understood." The Centre aims to compliment the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to serve the entire African continent in its mission of promoting human rights and democracy through training, action-oriented research, legal service, publications, documentation and networking.

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Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS)

FAS is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) working to engender the peace process in Africa. Since its inception in 1996, FAS has worked to foster, strengthen and promote the leading role of women in the prevention, management and resolution of conflicts on the African continent. FAS recognises that women are disproportionately affected by violent conflicts. FAS undertakes advocacy campaigns at the national, regional and international levels, raising awareness on the rights of African women and their crucial role in promoting peace and security.

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Women's Aid Collective (WACOL)

Founded in 1997, WACOL is an independent, non-governmental, non-profit organisation, committed to helping women and young people in need. The aim of WACOL is to increase legal protection and fight for better choices for abused women and children, facilitate flow of information and experiences between organisations, and develop appropriate information, education and communication materials to be used in advocacy to promote and protect the human rights of women and young people.

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Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF/FEDDAF)

Established in 1990 with the objective of promoting and strengthening respect for women's rights in Africa, WILDAF/FEDDAF is a Pan African network bringing together 500 women's rights organisations and 1200 individuals, in 27 countries. WILDAF/FEDDAF advocates for respect for women's rights at the national, regional and international levels, through law reforms and measures to ensure their implementation in practice. WILDAF/FEDDAF regularly disseminates training manuals and advocacy documents to its network.

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Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA)

WLSA is a regional NGO specialised in research on women's rights, present in 7 countries in Southern Africa. WLSA conducts strategic research and investigations in the socio-legal field. On the basis of the results of its research, WLSA develops advocacy actions, calling for legal reforms and changes to practices that discrimination against women. In order to share the results of its research throughout its network, WLSA organises seminars and training sessions and disseminates tools and methodologies related to gender studies.

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