

**SOLIDARITY FOR  
AFRICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

A force for freedom



**MOUVEMENT DE SOLIDARITÉ  
POUR LES DROITS  
DES FEMMES AFRICAINES**

Une force pour la liberté

JULY—SEPTEMBER 2009

**STAKEHOLDER'S MEETING ON DOMESTICATION & IMPLEMENTATION  
OF THE *PROTOCOL ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA***

The African Union Women, Gender and Development Directorate (AUWGDD), in collaboration with Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOWAR) Coalition and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), organized a stakeholders' meeting on domestication and implementation of the *Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa*.

The meeting discussed the progress made towards domestication and implementation of the *Protocol* as well as provided a forum for debate among participating national delegates and civil-society members on lessons learned and successful strategies. The meeting explored the role of civil society organizations and partnership with governments and the African Union in strengthening technical support needed for the domestication and implementation of the *Protocol*.

A major challenge raised during the discussion was the lack of conformity between country laws and constitutions. SOWAR coalition activities to promote and raise awareness on the *Protocol* were trumpeted as invaluable and civil-society organizations were encouraged to step up their efforts to enhance the *Protocol's* visibility.

During the meeting a state capacities needs assessment in implementing the *Protocol* in Liberia, Nigeria and Tanzania was presented by **Oxfam GB** under the Raising Her Voices Project. The assessment was used to determine gaps and identify possible initiatives

to ensure that states deliver on their obligations.

Also highlighted during the meeting was the joint undertaking by UNIFEM and AUWGDD to develop a tool kit to assist member states in fast tracking implementation of women's rights commitments. A reoccurring theme throughout the conference was the need for a multi-sectoral approach that incorporates various segments of government, development partners and civil society organizations to assist in implementing the *Protocol*.

Another key challenge raised by member states was the lack of financial support, it was proposed that a strategic approach to this dilemma was to have countries prioritize their plans of action and apply a multi-sectoral approach. Additionally, traditional and religious resistance

was also raised as a major impediment to realization of women's rights.

Emphasis was laid on the fact that the *Protocol* provides a mechanism for resolving matters peculiar to Africa, stressing issues of inheritance, succession and polygamy. Finally, the meeting produced a variety of recommendations, on how various individual sectors of society can help to realize domestication and implementation of the *Protocol*. The recommendations were targeted towards the following groups: the African Union Commission, State parties to the *Protocol*, Civil Society Organizations, the United Nations and Development partners.



**ANNOUNCEMENTS**

- *MenEngage Africa Symposium, October 5th-9th in Johannesburg, South Africa*
- *Invitation - Coordination of Multi-Sectoral Response to Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian settings, International Training Course, Ghent, Belgium. 2nd-13th November, 2009.*
- *NGO Forum, 7-9 November, 2009, Banjul, Gambia*
- *Regional Training Programme on the Equal Status and Human Rights of Women in East Africa, 2-13 November and 29 November-4 December 2009, Nairobi, Kenya*
- *SOAWR Annual Review and Agenda Setting Workshop, Nairobi, Kenya. 5-7 October 2009*

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## APPEAL FOR CLEMECNY: THE GAMBIA



On 9 August, six Gambian journalists were jailed for statements contained in a press release criticizing President Jammeh over comments he made slandering the memory of Deyda Hydara, a journalist, who was brutally murdered in 2004 by unknown assailants.

Among the six journalist imprisoned was Mrs. Sarata Jabbi-Dibba, Vice-President of the Gambian Press Union, who is nursing a seven month old baby. Initially the baby was removed to the SOS Children's Village, but

was later returned to Mrs. Jabbi-Dibba in Mile Two prison on 15 August.

The SOAWR coalition wrote an appeal to President Jammeh calling for Mrs. Jabbi-Dabbi's release along with her fellow journalists. Citing Section 218 (2) of the Gambian Children's Act 2005 at Article 30 (a, b & d) as well as the African Charter on Human and People's Rights to demonstrate how the sentence of a nursing mother violates the rights of the child and emphasize

ing the Gambia's responsibilities as a party to the *Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa*. The letter urged the President to give the journalists clemency.

The appeal also highlights the role the Gambia has in being a leader in securing human rights across Africa as it serves as the seat of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights, recently hosted the AU Gender Experts meeting in May 2009, and is expected to host the Beijing +15 review meeting in November 2009.

## A CALL TO SECURE WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN THE SUDAN



On July 10th, thirteen women were arrested by police in a restaurant in Khartoum and charged with violating the public dress code under article 152 (Indecent and Immoral Acts) of the 1991 Penal Code. Ten women were flogged. The arrests took place when the public order police stormed the restaurant and arrested women diners dressed in trousers, which they regarded as 'indecent'.

SOAWR in support of Sudanese women issued a press release urging the court to dismiss the charges and calling on the Government of Sudan to abolish this repressive law against women. *"The Charges are clearly an abuse of women's human rights and violate Sudanese women's full enjoyment of international conventions, most notably, the African Union's Protocol on the Rights of Women Africa,"* said Faiza Mohamed, Director of **Equality Now** which is the **SOAWR** secretariat.

A petition to the Government of Sudan to repeal discriminatory laws against women, which are embedded in Sudanese legislation, was started by women's organizations: <http://www.thepetitionsite.com/1/end-repressive-laws-targeting-women-in-sudan>.

The petition states that the actions by the public order police and Courts of Sudan contradict the declared government commitment to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of January 9th, 2005 and the National Interim Constitution and called on the government to uphold the International Covenant on Civil and political Rights, which Sudan acceded to in 1986, and which prohibits torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment such as flogging and protects women's right to be free from discrimination based on sex.

## Global efforts to end violence against women

On 10-11 September, Equality Now hosted a two day meeting ‘ *Global Efforts to Eradicate Violence against Women and Girls: A discussion on Approaches to combat sex trafficking, Legally uphold the Rights of Adolescent Girls and Domestic Violence Protocol on the Rights of Women* ’. The meeting brought together 24 lawyers and human rights activists working on combating trafficking and ending the commercial sexual exploitation of women from East and Southern Africa to share their experiences and discuss avenues of collaboration. The meeting also discussed using the Protocol as a tool to defend the rights of women and girls in Africa; and the participants had a chance to discuss a draft manual aimed to equip lawyers to use the Protocol in both domestic and regional litigation. The meeting also provided information on Equality Now’s Adolescent Girls Legal Defense Fund (AGLDF) which aims to protect the rights of adolescent girls through precedent-setting strategic litigation, and explore possibilities of collaboration on potential cases in attendees countries. At the end of the meeting participants developed a communiqué on trafficking of women and girls calling on states, among other things, to ratify and implement the Trafficking Protocol as well as the AU Protocol on the Rights of women.



Participants at the Global Efforts to Eradicate Violence against Women and Girls meeting in Nairobi, Kenya

## CAMEROON RATIFIES THE PROTOCOL

The Minister of Women’s Empowerment and Family, Madame Abena Ondo during a press briefing responded to protests against the ratification of the Protocol in Cameroon. She stated that the country ratified the Protocol on 28 May 2009 which she stated fell within the already existing framework of the implementation of the national strategy for the promotion and protection of women’s rights. She stated that the ratification of this text by Cameroon has confirmed and reiterated the option the country has always stood up for at international level, that of human rights protection. She cautioned about the misleading interpretation of the Protocol such as promoting childmurder that has been raised by protesters and said what has not been presented to the people is the various positive provisions that seek to empower women such as the right to inheritance, ending harmful cultural practices etc. She mentioned that the Protocol was ratified according to the law and passed through the National Assembly as required by law.

## RAISING HER VOICE

Following the Stakeholders Meeting on the Domestication and Implementation of the Protocol; Raising Her Voice Africa held a planning, learning and exchange meeting from July 19th-20th in Kigali.

The meeting sought to provide a forum for the RHV Project Implementers, consisting of nine SOAWR coalition members and OXFAM GB programme personnel, to share progress, discuss best practices and highlight challenges encountered in their activities thus far. The meeting also aimed to reach agreement on how to effectively manage and fast track the implementation of the project in the selected countries.

As intended the meeting served as a regional sharing and learning forum to network all the implementing partners, assess the level of progress in the implementation of the RHV Project and reach a collective commitment and vision for working together to further develop the RHV Project and attain the intended outcomes.

The meeting highlighted Global and Continental opportunities for action, disseminated the continental project logical framework to members and reached an agreement among country teams to create and submit individual country logical frameworks to the Global Programme Coordinator, and sign partnership agreements regarding programme activities, among a host of other activities.

In order to ensure joint monitoring and learning specifically in the context of rapid staff turnover meeting participants agreed to document comprehensively and ensure institutional memory is safeguarded within the programmer. One important way of realizing this is through the utilization of the <http://raisingheroice.ning.com> platform.

The meeting also discussed ways for partner groups and OXFAM GB to work better together as a unit and discussed various challenges that have been experienced over the course of the programme thus far. A series of agreements were reached to help combat these difficulties in the future and ensure the project continues to reach its goals and objectives efficiently.

BEIJING + 15 REVIEW

The year 2010 will mark the 15th anniversary of the historic Beijing Declaration and the Platform for Action (PFA) adopted by the 4th World Conference on Women. At the 2009 53rd UN Commission on the Status of Women, NGOs and the CSW committee came together to brainstorm ideas on what actions can be taken at the national, regional and international levels as part of the Beijing +15 Review process. The Commission agreed to convene a special session for the Beijing +15 Review in 2010 which will be preceded by several activities that will take place to monitor progress made by governments in implementing the Platform of Action since the last review, Beijing +10.

At the conference, NGOs agreed to use the process of preparation for the 2010 CSW 54th Session to mobilize and popularize the Platform of Action to help galvanize more action at the national and regional levels. These activities will culminate in a proposed two-day NGO forum which will be held prior to the 2010 CSW 54th Session in New York whose theme is “The Review and Appraisal of the implementation of the Beijing Declaration and Platform of Action”.

At the 2009 CSW, women’s NGO Coordinating Committee was formed consisting of members from each region worldwide and thereafter each region would set up a taskforce. The Africa Regional Taskforce is responsible for mobilizing women’s organizations and individuals in

different countries to carry out activities at the national level, aimed at raising awareness on the 12 critical areas of concern and ensuring that governments take further appropriate measures and actions to implement the Beijing Platform for Action. The Africa taskforce is calling on women’s NGOs and civil society organizations to participate in national review activities and produce shadow reports, which will recognize the accomplishments made and also make suggestions on how to fill in the gaps in their countries. These reports will be collated sub-regionally, and sub-regional reports will inform the regional civil society report. The Economic Commission on Africa (UNECA) provided the questionnaires that NGOs are using to facilitate the information collection. FEMNET has circulated the questionnaire to all members of the Africa Task Force. FEMNET has also developed guidelines for National Working groups to assist the Beijing +15 Review Process.

*For additional information on the work of the Africa Task Force on Beijing + 15, contact: Chigedze Chiyepi Africa Regional Coordinator Email: cchinyepi@yahoo.com Naisola Likimani Advocacy Officer FEMNET Email: advocacy@femnet.or.ke Tel: 254 20 271 2971/2 .*

Status of Protocol	At September 2008	At September 2009
Total Signatures	45	45
Total Ratifications	25	28

Countries that have ratified the Protocol:

Angola, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cape Verde, Cameroon, The Comoros, Democratic Republic of Congo, Djibouti, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea-Bissau, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mozambique, Namibia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Tanzania, Togo, Zambia, Zimbabwe

**Holding States Accountable**

The Centre for Human Rights at the University of Pretoria, South Africa and the African Commission on Human and Peoples’ Rights held a meeting in Pretoria on 6th-7th August, 2009 to discuss guidelines for state reporting on the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa. In conjunction with LL.M students the Centre for Human Rights put together draft guidelines built on the existing guidelines under CEDAW and the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights. At the meeting participants brainstormed ways to ensure that the guidelines are ‘user-friendly’ while at the same time assisting the African Commission and member States to assess the progress made towards

implementation of the Protocol. Successful applications and challenges were also discussed. Equality Now representative Caroline Muthoni Muriithi provided information on the Domestication meeting held in Kigali and the work of the SOAWR coalition to promote the domestication and implementation of the Protocol across Africa. “The guidelines are a welcome development especially as we continue to push for the domestication and implementation of the Protocol” Muthoni stated.

The revised guidelines will be sent out soon for comments and it is anticipated that the Guidelines will be presented to the African Commission at its 46th session in November 2009.

**Popularizing the Protocol in Liberia**

The Women for Peace Network (WOLPNET) engaged in a number of sensitization activities in Monteserrado and Bongo Counties in Liberia. The activities brought together about 118 participants including community members, religious leaders, government officials, NGO’s and CBO’s. The purpose of the meeting was to create awareness and sensitize participants about the Raising her voices project in their communities and the importance of the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women. The meeting also sought to generate dialogue among community members on the provisions of the Protocol and how they could utilize it to claim their rights.

## NIGERIA INTENSIFIES THE PROTOCOL CAMPAIGN

## SEXUAL RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS

On 16 July, LEADS Nigeria in partnership with Women's Rights Advancement and Protection (WRAPA) held a capacity building for grassroots women in Kaduna state, Nigeria. The purpose of the capacity building was to train women on advocacy skills that they could transfer to other women at the community level to enable them embark on advocacy visits to the State House of Assembly, religious and traditional leaders to pass laws on the various provisions of the Protocol at the state level, initiate cultural reform through traditional leaders and also sensitize their followers on the Protocol in their sermons

Baobab for Women's Human Rights held an annual national dialogue from 21-22 July 2009 in Abuja under the theme '*Engaging with the AU Protocol on Women's Rights: Making the strategic connection to international human rights instruments*'. The meeting drew participants from NGO's, CBO's, religious and cultural leaders as well as key government institutions. The dialogue highlighted the importance of the Protocol and called on the government of Nigeria to set up effective mechanisms for the domestication and implementation of the Protocol. Some of the key outcomes of the meeting was the commitment by participants to engage actively in activities similar to those under the raising her voices (RHV) project which seek to push for the domestication and implementation of the Protocol in Nigeria.

On 30th July 2009 the International Federation of Women Lawyers (FIDA) Nigeria under the RHV project held a capacity building workshop for grassroots women in Enugu state. The capacity building workshop popularized the Protocol among grassroots women in the state and called on them to sensitize the communities on the Protocol as well as mobilize women to engage in advocacy to negotiate their rights as provided in the AU women's Protocol. The women were trained on advocacy skills and techniques they could utilize to campaign for the implementation of the Protocol. At the end of the meeting, participants agreed that they would pressurize the women leadership locally and nationally to advocate for the domestication and implementation of the Protocol in Nigeria.

## OUTREACH CAMPAIGNS

On 20th August, **Equality Now** participated in a breakfast meeting on ratification of the Protocol organized by the International Commission of Jurists Kenya Chapter. During this meeting participants strategized on how to push for Kenya's ratification. Equality Now had a chance to share the work that the coalition has seen doing and called on Kenyan organizations to join hands and push for Kenya to ratify the Protocol.

The **Federation of Women Lawyers** hosted a 'brown bag' session on discriminatory laws in Kenya on 7 September 2009. The purpose of the meeting was to look at discriminatory laws affecting women's rights in Africa. And strategize on legal reform to abolish these laws. **Equality Now** used the opportunity to talk about the Protocol campaign and the provisions within the Protocol that would ensure Kenya repeals laws that discriminate against women and highlighted the importance of Kenya ratifying and implementing the Protocol.

In support of advocacy efforts by SOAWR, **Fahamu** developed posters and brochures for the SOAWR coalition in preparation of the Gender Festival in Tanzania and will prepare publicity material for the coalition to be distributed during the SOAWR annual review meeting. **Fahamu** also highlighted women's rights issues by publishing over 30 articles in the Pambazuka news. It is also in the process of developing a short podcast to promote the SOAWR campaign as well as working on producing a documentary on women's experiences during the post-election violence in Kenya.

Sister Namibia is currently developing an educational and advocacy booklet titled 'sexual rights are human rights' which will illustrate how specific cultural practices violate women's sexual rights currently protected under human rights instruments including the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women. This will be piloted and finalised with partner organisations and government stakeholders in workshops in October/November 2009, with the aim of raising awareness in the public sector and in civil society. The booklets will be officially launched in English and Oshiwambo and will be distributed to policy makers, traditional leaders, churches, educational institutions, and the media. Sister Namibia will also use it to train partner organisations and stakeholders on women's sexual and reproductive health rights, and to get their feedback/input, with the aim that they incorporate this new knowledge and understanding into their own educational and advocacy activities. Sister Namibia is currently developing a website where the booklet will also be published.

## INVOLVING RURAL WOMEN IN THE CAMPAIGN ON THE

In July Association des Juristes Maliennes (AJM) carried out five popularization activities in Mande, a rural commune in Mali which reaching out to women and men. AJM also trained its membership on the Protocol and its application to encourage them to use it in their work. AJM have also used local radio as a way to disseminate information about the Protocol to reach a wider audience in Mali.

## SOLIDARITY FOR AFRICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS

A force for freedom

SOAWR Secretariat  
c/o Equality Now  
P.O. Box 2018-00202  
Nairobi, Kenya

Phone: +254-20-2719832  
Fax: +254-20-2719868

**WWW.SOAWR.ORG**

A FORCE FOR FREEDOM



## MOUVEMENT DE SOLIDARITÉ POUR LES DROITS DES FEMMES AFRICAINES

Une force pour la liberté

**Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR)** is a coalition of 33 civil society organizations across the continent working to ensure that the *Protocol* to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa remains on the agenda of policy makers and to urge all African leaders to safeguard the rights of women through ratification and implementation of the *Protocol*.

### Coalition Members

**Alliance for Africa, African Centre for Democracy And Human Rights Studies (ACDHRS), Akina Mama wa Afrika, Association des Juristes Maliennes, Cellule de Coordination sur les Pratiques Traditionnelle Affectant la Sante des Femmes et des Enfants, BAOBAB for Women's Human Rights, Centre for Justice Studies and Innovations (CJSI), Coalition on Violence Against Women, Collectif des Associations et ONGS Féminines de Burundi (CAFOB), Eastern Africa Sub-regional Support Initiative (EASSI), Equality Now-Africa Regional Office, FAHAMU, FAMEDEV-Inter-African Network For Women, Media, Gender and Development, Girl Child Network (GCN), FEMNET - African Women's Development and Communication Network, Federation of Women Lawyers Kenya (FIDA-Kenya), Forum Muhler, Inter-African Committee on Harmful Traditional Practices (IAC), Human Rights Law Service (HURILAWS), Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), Oxfam GB, People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA), Sister Namibia, Strategic Initiative for the Horn of Africa (SIHA), Tomorrow's Child Initiative (TCI), Uganda Women's Network (UWONET), Union Nationale des Femmes de**

## SOAWR AT THE AU SUMMIT

In 2009 the Coalition continued to advocate at the continental, subregional and national levels to push for the ratification of the Protocol and also monitor its implementation, particularly by supporting national level lobbies to seek law and policy reforms, in order to make the Protocol more relevant and applicable to the lives of women in Africa.

As a result of these activities the Coalition has helped bring the number of countries who have ratified the Protocol to 28 as of September 2009. Major Coalition activities over the past year include participation at the 2nd African Union Pre-Summit on Gender in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from June 18th-19th, 2009. The Coalition facilitated the involvement of eight rural women from all four regions in Sub-Saharan Africa at the Pre-Summit themed: "Investing in Agriculture for Economic Growth and Food Security". From June 27th-28th, 2009 Coalition

members attended the 14th Pre-Summit Consultative Meeting on Gender Mainstreaming in the African Union in Tripoli where the Executive Director of FEMNET, Norah Matovu Winyi, made a presentation on behalf of SOAWR.

Members of the SOAWR coalition, Oxfam GB and FEMNET, participated in the AU Summit in Sirte, Libya, and got observer status to attend the Executive Council meeting where they distributed the SOAWR Statement and press release to official delegations and the media. Together these activities have helped bolster knowledge of the SOAWR coalition and members' activities among AU Executive Council members and Commissioners and other senior staff of the African Union Commission.

## UPCOMING EVENTS

- \* MenEngage Africa Symposium, October 5th-9th in Johannesburg, South Africa. For more information please contact: Orly Stern—[orly@genderjustice.org.za](mailto:orly@genderjustice.org.za), or Regis Mtutu: [regis@genderjustice.org.za](mailto:regis@genderjustice.org.za), or visit the symposium webpage at: <http://www.genderjustice.org.za/joburgsymposium> and [www.menengage.org](http://www.menengage.org).
- \* The International Centre for Reproductive Health/UNFPA—Coordination of Multi-Sectoral Response Gender-Based Violence in Humanitarian Settings, on 2nd-13th November, 2009, Ghent Belgium. For more information contact: [nankoe@unfpa.org](mailto:nankoe@unfpa.org) and [Ellen.taets@ugemt.be](mailto:Ellen.taets@ugemt.be)
- \* NGO FORUM: 7-9 November, Banjul, Gambia organized by the African Centre for Democracy and Human Rights. For more information contact ACDHRS at Tel: +220 44 62 341-2 or Fax: 220- 44 62 338-9 or email: [acdhrs@adhrs.org](mailto:acdhrs@adhrs.org) / [admin@acdhrs.org](mailto:admin@acdhrs.org) / [csec@acdhrs.org](mailto:csec@acdhrs.org)
- \* The Regional Training Programme on the Equal Status and Human Rights of Women in East Africa organized by the Raoul Wallenberg Institute. Applicants from the following countries are welcome to apply for the program: Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Rwanda, Tanzania and Uganda. Please note that applications from applicants from non listed countries will not be considered due to budgetary limitation. Deadline 12 October 2009.. For more information contact Raoul Wallenberg Institute, Attn: EAHUWO 2009, Email: [ivy.kihara@rwi.lu.se](mailto:ivy.kihara@rwi.lu.se), Telephone: +254 20 2519960 or + 254 20 3744266.
- \* The SOAWR Annual Review Meeting, 5-8 October 2009, Nairobi, Kenya. SOAWR will be hosting the annual SOAWR review meeting to evaluate the progress of the coalition in the last year. For more information contact Naisola Lakimani, telephone (254) 20.2712971/2, email: [advocacy@femnet.org](mailto:advocacy@femnet.org)