

**SOLIDARITY FOR
AFRICAN WOMEN'S RIGHTS**

A force for freedom



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

Une force pour la liberté

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SOAWR members at the Annual review meeting

SPREADING OUR WINGS: A MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH TO WOMEN'S RIGHTS

On 5-7 October 2009, The Solidarity for African Women's Rights Coalition (SOAWR) held its' annual review meeting in Nairobi, Kenya. The meeting was attended by over 30 participants from 15 countries (Ethiopia, Gambia, Guinea Conakry, Kenya, Liberia, Mozambique, Nigeria, Namibia, Senegal, South Africa, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe). This year's theme was, "Spreading Our Wings: A Multi-Sectoral Approach to Women's Rights". The main objectives of the meeting included progress review of the 2008/2009 year, sharing of the best practices in the year, strategizing on the African Women's Decade from 2010-2020 and setting the framework for the next strategic plan. In addition to reviewing progress of the coalition's activities based on the strategic plan, the members were also familiarized with new tools of working such as the UNIFEM multi-sectoral approach in accelerating the domestication and implementation of the Protocol. The coalition also heard findings from an Oxfam study in Nigeria, Liberia and Tanzania on capacity gaps that also impede implementation of the Protocol. Capitalizing on the presence of SOAWR members in Nairobi, FEMNET organized lobby visits to various Embassies in Nairobi (Sudan, Burundi and Ethiopia) to urge their gov-

ernments to ratify the Protocol. The main output from the meeting was a communiqué from the members that called for increased ratification of the Protocol and its implementation using the multi-sectoral approach. They also envisioned the African Women's Decade to be a critical period to actualize commitments made by member states both in the form of the rights provided in the Protocol and the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa (SGDEA) and building on key advocacy moments such as the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) session in February/March 2010 which will facilitate a global review of pro-

gress since the Beijing World Conference. Some of the things SOAWR hopes to see by the end of the decade included; 'Girls and women respected as equals with the same opportunities and equal power relations to make informed choices about their sexuality, bodily integrity and realizing their rights'; SOAWR to become a reference point for policy decisions in the Continent'; 75% domestication of the Protocol and 50% full implementation of the Protocol'; and rights to be enjoyed by African women including the minorities such as rural women, sexual minorities, and women living with disabilities. **For the full report please visit www.soawr.org or contact Equality Now at guwizeye@equalitynow.org**

Conference participants undertaking various activities



UPCOMING EVENTS

- * African Women Public Service Fellowship. Deadline: 7th January 2010. Visit <http://wagner.nyu.edu/international/awpsf.php>
- * African Union Summit under the theme 'ICT in Africa, challenges and prospect for development' 25 January– 2 February 2010. For more information please visit www.africa-union.org
- * 4th African Conference on Sexual Health and Rights, February 9-12 2009, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. For details visit <http://www.africasexuality.org>
- * 54th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW), 1– 12 March 2010, New York. For more information visit <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/csw/NGO.html> OR contact FEMNET at advocacy@femnet.co.ke or Tel: +245-20-2712971/2

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

SPREADING OUR WINGS:	1
AFRICAN WOMEN AND BEIJING +15	2
FAHAMU & SIHA ADVOCACY EFFORTS	2
ENGAGING THE PAN AFRICAN PARLIAMENT RATIFICATION STATUS	2
EQUALITY NOW FILM SCREENING	3
UPDATES FROM FEMNET, SISTER NAMIBIA AND WOLPNET, PAMBAZUKA SPECILA ISSUE	3
NEW MEMBERS & 16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM ACTIVITIES IN NIGERIA & SOUTH AFRICA	4



From right, Ms. Hannah Forster (ACDHRS), H.E Dr. Isatou Njie-Saidy (Vice President of the Gambia) and Ms. Norah Matovu (FEMNET)

AFRICAN WOMEN AT THE 8TH AFRICA REGIONAL CONFERENCE ON WOMEN (BEIJING +15)

On 13-21 November 2009, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA) convened the 8th Africa Regional Conference on Women (Beijing +15) in Banjul, The Gambia, and created a space for civil society to participate in the Conference, including an opportunity to present to the Experts Meeting their summarized conclusions drawn from the synthesized draft Africa Regional NGO shadow report. The African Women's

Development and Communication Network (FEMNET), as part of the Africa NGO Taskforce on Beijing +15, convened a two day Consultative meeting for women's organizations in the margins of the 8th Africa Regional Conference on Women, to discuss the findings of the draft African NGO Shadow Report on Beijing +15, to dialogue on the key issues emerging and make recommendations for further action from African Governments. A total of 100 participants from 15 countries attended the Consultative meeting. Civil society organisations subsequently presented the conclusions and recommendations emanating from the Consultative meeting to the Experts and Gender Ministers meeting, around national and regional issues that should be included and addressed in the final

official report. Several CSO recommendations were integrated into the final report of the Experts, and adopted by the Ministers thereafter. SOAWR members attending the regional conference, including IAC, ACDHRS, EASSI, Equality Now, FEMNET and Oxfam GB lobbied the attending Ministers on the need for urgent ratification and implementation of the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, particularly advocating for the use of a multi-sectoral approach in implementing the provisions, and making recommendations on how the African Women's Decade can be utilized to deliver on commitments in the Protocol and other key women's right instruments like CEDAW. **The full report can be accessed at www.soawr.org**

FAHAMU'S CONTRIBUTION TOWARDS MAKING SOAWR VISIBLE

FAHAMU developed advocacy materials (brochures, posters and t-shirts) which were distributed to SOAWR members during the annual review meeting and to other stakeholders at various meetings. FAHAMU was also involved in advocacy efforts during the SOAWR annual review meeting in October 2009 and in particular were part of the SOAWR delegation to visit the Embassies of Burundi and Ethiopia in Nairobi. The materials developed by Fahamu will go a long way in making the campaign for women's rights visible.

Status of Protocol	At December 2008	At December 2009
Total Signatures	45	45
Total Ratifications	26	27



Children celebrating 16 Days of Activism in Sudan (photo courtesy of SIHA)

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

SIHA ADVOCACY EFFORTS

The Strategic Initiative for the Horn of Africa Women (SIHA) as part of the follow up to the arrest and trial of the woman journalist (Lubna) for wearing trousers, prepared a statement to the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights which was submitted on 16 November 2009. SIHA's statement highlighted the public order regime in Sudan that was applied in the case of Lubna who was charged with *'indecent and immoral acts'* under the Criminal Code of Sudan. SIHA noted that *'...the ideology underpinning the public order regime results in its disproportionate use against women and marginalised groups. In particular, different standards are applied to the behaviour of men and women in public and in private, violating a range of guarantees.'* SIHA called on the Commission to take into consideration the submission in preparation of observations in the context of the recent promotional mission to Sudan and called on the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa to call to attention the impact

of the public order regime on women and girls . SIHA called on the African Commission to recall Sudan's obligations to implement the Commissions recommendation to reform the public order regime and amendment of the Criminal Code of 1991.

To commemorate the sixteen (16) Days of Activism, SIHA purchased a one hour radio programme through the national radio station (Omdurman Radio) which was broadcasted on 8 December 2009. The Programme interviewed politicians from the ruling party and opposition on their commitment to ratify the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women and towards ending violence against women.

SIHA also organized art workshops with children in primary schools in Uganda and Sudan throughout the 16 Days of Activism. During these workshops the children illustrated through drawings how they perceived violence against women.



POTENTIAL FOR THE PAN AFRICAN PARLIAMENT TO IMPLEMENT THE DECISIONS OF THE AFRICAN UNION

On 5 October 2009, Irūngū Houghton, the Pan Africa Director at Oxfam GB presented a policy document before the Pan African Parliament to discuss the role of the Pan African Parliament in implementing the decisions of the African Union including treaties and protocols, regulations, directives, recommendations and declarations made at the AU level. In particular, Irungu pointed out the progress of ratification and implementation of AU treaties and protocols to date noting that *'By its own admission, the African Union has done very poorly in accelerating the ratification of key legal instruments'*. He therefore made recommendations in particular that the Pan African Parliament should identify core treaties and instruments [such as the AU Protocol on the Rights of Women] that would have the effect of improving the lives of millions of Africans and thereafter undertake periodic monitoring of member states compliance.

To get a copy of the statement please visit www.soawr.org



EQUALITY NOW FILM SCREENING– AFRICA RISING

On 30 October 2009, Equality Now film, 'Africa Rising' was screened at the Kenya International Film Festival in Nairobi, Kenya. The film follows different girls in various African countries subjected to female genital mutilation (FGM). From Kenya to Mali stopping in Somalia, Burkina Faso and Tanzania along the way the film is an honest and hard hitting look into the young lives that are shattered by this practice. The film exposes some of the myths surrounding FGM and breaks the silence on a subject that can be hard to discuss. After the screening, a panel discussion was held including Faiza Mohamed (Equality Now), Agnes Pareiyo (Tasaru Ntomonok Initiative), Hubbie Hussein (Woman Kind Kenya) and Dr. Morissanda Kouyate (Coordinating Committee on Traditional Practices Affecting Women's

and Children's Health (CPTAFE) who talked about the work they have done against FGM and called for government to take stern action to end the practice once and for all. Faiza also called on the public to put pressure on the Government of Kenya and others to ratify the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Kenya as it provides a basis for the elimination of FGM and requires states to take all necessary measures to end the practice including enacting laws and policies that protect women and children from FGM. To get more information on the film please visit <http://www.africarisingthefilm.com>

FEMNET LEADS THE WAY IN AWARENESS RAISING

On 28-30 September 2009, FEMNET organized a Leadership Conference in Togo for a group of 30 women politicians drawn from 7 French speaking countries (Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Gabon, Guinea, Niger, Sao Tome & Principe and Togo). FEMNET distributed French copies of the Protocol and simplified the provisions of the Protocol during the conference especially those relating to political participation of women. The purpose of the meeting was to ensure that women politicians in the participating countries which have elections in 2009 & 2010 promote & lobby for law and policy reforms in their respective countries to support more equitable participation of men and women in leadership and decision making. The workshop increased awareness of the campaign around the women's rights Protocol.

On 26– 27 November 2009 FEMNET Resource centre held an open day for the Kenyan public as part of its 16 Days of Activism activities. SOAWR materials and publications were distributed to visitors over the two days. On 26 November, FEMNET launched the Kenyan Shadow Report on Beijing +15 as part of the 16 days of Activism against Gender Based Violence. The report highlights Kenya's slow pace in implementing the Beijing Platform for Action that has led to it being one of the 26 African countries that is yet to ratify the Protocol. **For more information on the report please contact: Naisola Lakimani at Email: advocacy@femnet.or.ke or Tel: +254-20-2712971/2**

WOLPNET REACHES OUT TO THE COMMUNITY

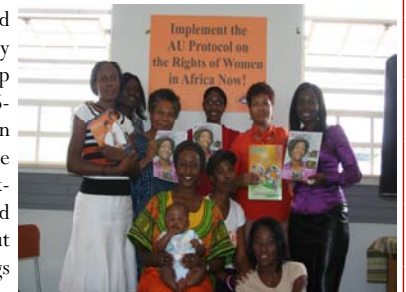
In November 2009 a programme was organized within PUC– People United Community, Sinkor Monterado to present the AU Protocol to the community members and discuss Article 5 – ending female genital mutilation. This was to promote the use of the Protocol as a tool to claim rights and to increase understanding of its provisions and generate interest in the community to support the fight against FGM in particular. A one day forum was organized by the Liberian Women Media Action Committee - LIWOMAC in partnership with WONGOSOL Women NGO Secretariat to strengthen media partnership in raising awareness around the Protocol. The forum in December brought together journalists and activists to help develop advocacy strategies to promote the Protocol in order to actualize its' implementation. Topics discussed included– raising the voice of poor women and a practical analysis of the media's role in promoting women's rights.

PAMBAZUKA SPECIAL ISSUE

Equality Now and FAHAMU generated articles for a special issue of Pambazuka (Pan-African Voices for Freedom and Justice) to commemorate the Beijing + 15 Progress Review; the 30th anniversary of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's rights on the Rights of Women which came into force four years ago. A number of SOAWR members including Caroline Agengo (Tomorrow's Child Initiative), Marren Akatsa Bukachi (EASSI), Mary Wandia (Oxfam GB), Morissanda Kouyaté (CPTAFE) and Norah Matovu (FEMNET) contributed articles. To access the special issue please visit: <http://www.pambazuka.org/en/issue/458>

WOMEN CLAIM CITIZENSHIP IN NAMIBIA

Sister Namibia supported a workshop held by Women's Leadership Centre's (WLC) on 26-28 October on 'Women claiming citizenship'. The objectives of the workshop were; to inform and educate women about their rights and things they were entitled to as women and as equal citizens of Namibia; to



Participants of the 'claiming citizenship' workshop in Namibia courtesy of Sister Namibia

inform women of the different instruments protecting their rights apart from the Namibian Constitution; and to meet with the various political party representatives to hear their opinions on women's issues and gender prior to the November 2009 elections. The women met representatives of various political parties and demanded their rights be met and respected. A WLC booklet outlining women's demands in line with the Namibian Constitution as well as the AU Protocol was launched and given to the political parties present. The women presented stories on how their rights continue to be violated and demanded that the government and civil society make their rights a priority. Women learnt more about the various local, regional and international instrument in place to protect women's rights. Sister Namibia also held a workshop on 'Claiming our sexual citizenship'. Participants were expected to learn more about sexual rights and how to demand them in public and private life. Participants gained a deeper understanding of gender and a better understanding of the international instruments such as the AU Protocol. A new understanding of LGBTI rights was also achieved during the workshop. With regards to media the Sister Namibia magazine December edition will be distributed, alongside a radio show called 'Women's voices' which talks about the highlights of the workshops. The magazine contains articles highlighting the SOAWR meeting in Nairobi and other workshops. The radio show included participants from the workshops emphasizing the importance of the AU Protocol and how women can better demand their rights. Recordings from the meeting in Nairobi were also aired on the show outlining the importance of the AU in Namibia and Africa as a whole.

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NEW MEMBERS

In December 2009, the SOAWR steering committee approved three new memberships. SOAWR extends a warm welcome to the **African Women Development Fund (AWDF)** based in Ghana, **NGO Gender Coordination Network (NGO-GCN)** based in Malawi and **Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA)** based in Zambia.

Solidarity for African Women's Rights (SOAWR) is a coalition of 36 civil society organizations across the continent working to ensure that the *Protocol* to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights 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), African Women Development Fund (AWDF), 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 (CAFOD), 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 (HURLAWS), Legal and Human Rights Centre (LHRC), NGO Gender Coordination Network (NGO-GCN), 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 Djibouti, Voix de Femmes, University of Pretoria Center for Human Rights, Women Direct, Women of Liberia Peace Network (WOLPNET), Women in Law and Development in Africa (WiLDAF), Women and Law in Southern Africa (WLSA), and Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternatives (WRAPA)



ACTIVISTS PETITION PARLIAMENT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN IN NIGERIA

Committee on Women Affairs. Mrs. Hajia Saudatu Mahdi, Executive Secretary, WRAPA, read out a petition and later handed the same to the Senator. The petition noted with concern that cases of violence against women such as that of Grace were never investigated and prosecuted creating a culture of impunity.

This impunity has continued 30 years after the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 15 years after the Beijing World Conference on Women and 4 years after the adoption and ratification of the African Union Protocol on the Rights of Women.

The activists called on the executive and legislative arms of the Nigerian government to undertake full scale investigation to bring to justice Grace Ushang killers, take appropriate measures to guarantee the safety and personal security of Nigerian women, and to pass without delay the bill on violence against women which has been pending since 2002.

As part of the 16 Days of Activism in Nigeria, Women's Rights Advancement and Protection Alternative (WRAPA) together with other women's organizations mobilized activists in their hundreds and marched through the streets of Abuja. The activists called for investigations into the rape and murder of Grace Ushang, a 24 year old lady in the north eastern city of Maiduguri, who was raped while she was undergoing the mandatory National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) scheme for university graduates. The activists went to the Parliament grounds where they were received by Senator Eme Ufot Ekaete, the chairperson of the Senate

16 DAYS OF ACTIVISM IN SOUTH AFRICA

People Opposing Women Abuse (POWA) together with the South African Post Offices came together to run an innovative and informative awareness campaign for postal workers. The project had two components to it – the first component was encouraging women postal workers to write anonymous letters to those who abused them and the letter would also form part of the advocacy materials used in the exhibition which run for the duration of the 16 Days of Activism in two Post Office sites. The exhibition was a space in a bedroom with facts and figures on domestic violence, RAPE: the exhibition consisted of life-size cutouts so that visitors could walk among the cutout figures and SEXUAL HARRASSMENT: where visitors were surrounded by

recordings of a sexual harassment survivor telling her story. The exhibition also featured the history of the struggle for women's rights in the form of protest art, interviews with Post Office women on the progress made internally over the past 30 years, and informed victims/survivor what they could do when confronted with abuse. The exhibition was put up at the Post Office headquarters in Pretoria and at Witspos mail-sorting centre in Johannesburg.

On 27 November, POWA launched the first second-stage housing facility for abused women in Gauteng. The housing facility is available to survivors of gender-based violence, with or without children, on a rent-geared-to-income basis. The housing enhances survivors' ability to live violent free lives on a long term basis and to take control of their lives