

## **ON THE 31<sup>st</sup> JULY, UK WILPF LAUNCHED THE AFRICAN WOMEN'S DECADE 2010-2020**

The UK Section of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) Launched the African Women's Decade 2010-2020 in London on the 31st of July; which was the 48th Pan African Women's Day. The event was hosted by the Centre for Gender Study at School of Oriental and African Studies, University in London, from 2-5pm.

**Please join us in supporting UK WILPF Voices of African Women Campaign** by promoting this event and our work in other WILPF sections, as well as in your communities; particularly where there are African Diaspora women; and to your own government and various institutions working in Africa on gender equality, peace, disarmament, justice, democracy and sustainable development.

The promise of Africa's Decade for Women is action on the various declarations and conventions which have not yet delivered gender equality. The African Union urge members state to reach absolute gender parity for 2020, in conformity with article 5 of the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol).

Below is an informative text.

### **What was the main focus/discussion point at the UK WILPF launch of the African Women's Decade in London?**

The main focus of the event was to mark the start of the African Women's Decade 2010-2020 and raise awareness about it here in the UK, as well as commemorate, and celebrate the achievement and survival of African women. More importantly the event promoted the Maputo Protocol (African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa); which meets the expectation of the majority of women in the continent; particularly the new generation, aspiring for peace, gender equality, justice by the rule of law and the protection of human rights and physical integrity.

The African Women's Decade (2010-2020) was adopted in October 2009, by the African Union (AU), the continental wide organisation that encompasses 53-member states. The African Women's Decade Campaign was initiated by the Women and Gender Development Directorate of the African Union. This is quite unique; as it has officially put women at the centre of the work of the African Union, hence set a milestone for gender transformation and implementation of the rule of law in Africa.

African countries have a lot of good policies on paper that are not implemented. African women have been campaigning for gender equality and protection of women's rights for a long time, calling on leaders to sign and ratify policies and conventions. They have done this but so many countries are not implementing them and the rights of women continue to be abused. The promise of Africa's Decade for Women is action on the various declarations and conventions which have not yet delivered gender equality.

It is really sad to say that Africa sees a disproportionately increased maternal mortality rate. Deaths caused by pregnancy is more than all deaths from AIDS, TB, malaria combined!!! This has been described as the gender scandal of our time, and a violation of human rights!! One in sixteen women and girls die giving birth in Africa. 14 per cent of those who do, die from unsafe abortions and 60 per cent of these women are under the age of 25. Nigeria, Ethiopia and the Democratic Republic of Congo are among the six countries that are responsible for 50 per cent of all deaths globally!

The shocking lack of readily available health services for women in Africa, is endangering women's well-being and resulting in tragically high numbers of women dying in childbirth. Furthermore, 35 per cent of HIV infections and 38 per cent of AIDS deaths in 2007 occurred in that sub-region. Women account for half of all people living with HIV worldwide, and nearly 60 per cent of HIV infections in sub-Saharan Africa, demonstrating that there are serious gendered causes and impacts that governments need to address to save women's lives in Africa.

Regardless of the various legal frameworks and existing gender policies ect..., violence against women (emotional, physical, sexual) are still striving and is fuelled by total impunity ; lack of access to justice. Harmful practices such as Female Genital Mutilation are still ongoing; the law to end FGM in Sudan has even been reversed and decriminalised!! Putting millions of lives of Sudanese young girls and women in danger. Shamefully, Rwanda has now introduce a bill for forced sterilization of women crime against humanity, hence undermining reproductive health goals and undo decades of work by women's around the world, to ensure respect for reproductive rights.

In recent years, due to conflicts, oppressive regimes and poverty, we've seen a horrible increased in the rate of sexual violence, like nowhere before. According to Rape Statistics-South Africa and World Wide (2008), South Africa leads the world in rape cases.<sup>4</sup> The report notes that in 2006, there were close to 55,000 reported rape cases and that an estimated 450, 000 cases went unreported. Rape is an occurrence that, according to official statistics, occurred approximately 16,000 times annually during the 1980s. The DR Congo has been labeled as the capital of rape, where it is not safe to be a woman. The armed conflict has generated one of the worst scenario of rape crisis with an estimated 1 million women who have been raped since the conflict started in 1997, with victims as young as 7 month old babies and elderly women as old as 75 yrs' as weapon of war. Eritrean women forced to join the army for national duties are been raped and condemned to die, in prison if they refuse to serve; or killed trying to seek refuge out of the country.

In Sudan, women have been subjected to the worst kind of humiliation and sexual violence as a tool of war, particularly in Darfur. Thousands of women and girls who were sexually assaulted and raped during the post-election mayhem that ravaged Kenya. Kenyan Women have to Look to the Hague for Justice as their male dominated government could not even offer them justice or reparation. Even in Guinea, women were raped in day light during the recent trouble in 2008; as a warning and tool of political intimidation. In Zimbabwe, women were raped during the 2008 election, opposing political parties unleashed "sexual terror" against women who supported the other political parties. Millions of African women victims of rape are too fearful — or too sceptical of getting any redress against their attackers — to come forward; so many are dying in silence from sexually transmitted by force; other are forced to carry unwanted pregnancy . African women's bodies continue to be a battle ground for African men to wage their senseless war over political power own by many neocolonialists multinationals corporation who are only to pleased test their arms while illegally exploiting natural resources in Africa.

### **This gender inequality and Violence against women must end NOW!!!**

This 2010-2020 decade is the time to double our actions. It is therefore a great opportunity for African women, (from young girls to old ladies) and men in the Diaspora and the African continent to embrace and own this Decade (2010-2020), to pay greater attention and work together on the existing tools that are available; and new ones, to improve the lives of women, health of women, eradicate mortality of women as a consequence of child birth, reduce women's poverty, improve women's education and participation leading to the empowerment of the mass of women. African women have actually being given central stage and they particularly have to take that opportunity to use it to the maximum in order to effect the necessary changes in the African continent; which will benefit their wellbeing and that of their children.

No more Promise! The African Union and its member states have to walk the talk, on women's rights, Stop Violence Against Women And Girls. Secure Women's Equal land rights. End Impunity! Save African Girls from Sexual violence. Enhancing Women's rights protection which will strengthen Democracy in Africa.

British women in solidarity with Diaspora African women members of UK WILPF used the UK launch of the African Women Decade to ask the UK, African and other governments; as well as NGOs partners, to work harder on women's issues in Africa; to promote the Maputo Protocol (African Charter on Human and Peoples

Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa) and various legal framework documents for the protection and advancement of women's rights and their participation in the good governance in Africa. UK WILPF members campaigning on the VoAW, are drawing a road map for the Decade 2010-2020; while asking them to act on the Voices of African Women Declaration:<http://www.gopetition.co.uk/petitions/voices-of-african-women-declaration.html>

We will promote existing legal frameworks and join other leading local African women who have requested governments to put a moratorium on new instruments, while we request action plans for the implementation of existing ones, as well as accountability. We want African Governments to be held accountable, and take their responsibility vis à vis their commitment, so as to push African governments to work harder on women's issues: those who have not ratified the various legal frameworks to ratify; those who have already ratified to put money aside for implementation with concrete action such as clear gender budgeting as well as allocating more funding for food security, human security, justice, better education /health care for sustainable development and that less money be allocated to military expenditure.

We will be monitoring this decade and evaluating the situation of women; every year from now till 2020; each 31st of July, to assess progress and challenges. But we will also be doing our own work to support women in the African continent; and to compare it to what the African Union and its member states or other stake holders will be doing during this decade. The African Union should first start by bridging the gender disparity gap seen in its high offices, where the number of women in the African Union decision making hierarchy is still low, with only 20% of the Permanent Representative Committee of the AU being women; this is breaching its own African Union Solemn Declarations On Gender Equality. This Decade is to demand accountability and actions!!!

Every human being is entitled to live in peace and to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health conducive to living a life in dignity. African government's must end impunity and act to protect women's rights. Conflict, poverty, and HIV/AIDS still need to be eradicated in order to ensure women in Africa (and around the world) are able to live up to their full potential. Measures must be put in place to improve child and maternal health, sexual and reproductive health services, including access to family planning, pre and post-natal care, emergency obstetric services and access to information, as well as to resources necessary to act on that information

### **What was new and interesting about this 31st of July Pan-African women's day compared with the other 8th Mach women's day?**

This women's day event was quite unique, because this is the first ever declared Decade for African women, and it actually put women at the centre of the work of the African Union, hence everything that will be done in Africa for the 10 years to come. This launch was all about African women integration and participation as change makers for this Decade of actions for gender transformation in the Africa African continent.

The African Union Commission has written to UK WILPF members to congratulate and thank our members for taking this initiative of doing a UK launch here in London for the Diaspora African women. There were ambassadors, diplomats and media in attendance to hear the voices of African women defending their rights, by reading and promoting articles of the African Charter on the Rights of Women (Maputo protocol) which hold relevance to them. The day was conclude with a launching of white balloons and an African dance display and light refreshment The event was hosted by the Centre for Gender Study at School of Oriental and African Studies, University in London, near Russell Square from 2-5pm.

**Please join us to support UK WILPF Voices of African Women Campaign.**

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