

## **Women's rights in Africa - press briefing**

Ahead of International Women's Day tomorrow, we are issuing /have just issued a statement by the High Commissioner, in which he warns that the backlash against the progress in realising women's rights hurts us all.

Also today, we have launched together with the African Union and UN Women, a report into women's rights in Africa. It is the first in a planned series about women's human rights on the continent that will address thematic issues.

There have been great strides in realising women's rights in Africa - for example, female participation in African legislatures surpasses that of many developed countries. There are now provisions on sexual and gender-based violence, economic, social and cultural rights and non-discrimination in constitutions and policies across the continent.

But in every country in Africa, as around the world, women continued to be denied full enjoyment of their rights.

Among some of report's statistics: in six African countries, there is no legal protection for women against domestic violence. In 2013, African women and girls accounted for 62% of all global deaths from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth. An estimated 130 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM, mainly in Africa. If current trends continue, almost half of the world's child brides in 2050 will be African.

In Africa and globally, it is clear that when women are able to exercise their rights to access to education, skills, and jobs, there is a surge in prosperity, positive health outcomes, and greater freedom and wellbeing, not only of women but the whole society.

In many countries, gaps in protecting women's rights are compounded by political instability and conflict. The report stresses that women should not be seen only as victims but, for example, as active agents in formal and informal peace building processes.

Among its recommendations, the report calls on African governments to encourage women's full and productive employment, to recognize the importance of unpaid care and domestic work, and to ensure women can access and control their own economic and financial resources.

**ENDS**

### Background

Report launched at 08:30 Addis (06:30 Geneva)

**Report examines:** Sexual and reproductive health and rights; women with albinism; sexual and gender-based violence; harmful practices; economic, social and cultural rights; laws that discriminate against women; women, peace and security; women in prison

**General** because it is the first of the series – subsequent ones will be on specific thematic issues

**SGBV:** No legal protection: Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Egypt, Lesotho, Mali and Niger

**Harmful practices:** Child marriages – only 5 countries have absolute legal prohibition on child marriage

**Other stats:** In Africa, 1 in 3 women have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner at some point in their lifetime

In 2013, African women and girls accounted for 62% (179,000) of all global deaths from preventable causes related to pregnancy and childbirth; in sub-Saharan Africa women comprise the highest percentage of new HIV infections, globally;