

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

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African Union Post Country Monitoring Mission on Ending Child Marriage and other Harmful Practices

In 2014, the African Union Commission launched the [Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa](#). This was to accelerate the implementation of Ending Child Marriage (ECM) programmes and interventions among member states. To date more than 30 countries have launched campaigns and are implementing national action plans and programmes to end child marriage. The Federal Republic of Nigeria launched its nation-wide campaign along with the National Strategy to End Child Marriage (2016 - 2021) at the highest political level, by the Vice President; H. E. Prof. Yemi Osinbajo. The nation became the 16th country to join the AU campaign to End Child Marriage.

Against this backdrop, The AU monitoring team led by the AU Special Rapporteur on Child Marriage and other Harmful Practices; Hon. Hermine Kembo Takam Gatsing engaged Government institutions in Nigeria, including the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs, National Human Rights Commission, Coalition of Civil Society Organisations, Traditional and Religious Leaders, United Nations Agencies Offices and other International/Development Partners working to eliminate Child Marriage and other Harmful Practices in the Federal Republic of Nigeria.

Representing the National Human Rights Commission, Mr Tony Ochucku, the Special Assistant to the Executive Secretary welcomed the AU team and indicated that the rights of women and children is one of critical focus areas for the Commission. "We have a dedicated department of women and children, as well as a special focal officer on Gender issues whose major responsibility is to track policies and other development around the human rights of women and children in Nigeria". He added that the Commission has carried several interventions with relevant stakeholders in ensuring the protection of girls from child marriage, education inequalities, violence, climate justice and inequitable access to health care. The Director for Women and Children Department, Mr Harry Obi added the numerous complaints of allegations and cases of human rights abuses and violations they receive, undertakes investigations and make varying recommendations aimed at addressing the human rights issues in the complaints. Some of the complaints includes; Sexual Gender Based Violence(SGBV), harmful cultural practices, forceful marriages, women trafficking, child marriage and child sexual abuse.

During the meeting with Government Stakeholders at the Federal Ministry of Women's Affairs Conference Room, the Federal Minister for Women Affairs, Hon. Dame Pauline K. Tallen reiterated her commitment in ensuring implementation of free education up to Senior Secondary to save the situation of ignorance which prevents Nigerian girl-child from understanding that getting into early marriage may be inimical to her development in life. "Education is the life investment; it is the first empowerment we give a child; once a child is educated, she can decide what is right or bad for herself," she said. She revealed that girls who marry in childhood often suffer short falls in schooling and nutrition, and its negative effects to the entire society on fertility, income, productivity and child maternal health runs across generations. Her advocacy has led to the domestication of the Child Rights Acts (2003) by 33 out of 36 States in Nigeria and the Violence Against Persons Prohibition Act (VAPP) (2015) by 34 out of 36 States which has giving legal backing to prosecute offenders/violators of women and girls' human rights. The Hon. Minister also gave the AU delegation all relevant support needed to carry out their mission successfully.

The AU monitoring team engaged in series of interactive sessions with the Coalition of Civil Society Organisations, Girls Voices Initiatives and the United Nation Agencies and other International/Development Partners. It came to light during the discussions that, the missing of marriage age under the Child Rights Acts and other legal instruments is a bane to achieving zero Child Marriage, as well as non-compliance with the domesticated laws at the States level. The traditional and religious leaders emphasized on rebranding the campaign name to be acceptable by all, especially in the local communities in order to ensure rapid elimination of Child Marriage and other Harmful Practices.

The AU delegation debriefed the Permanent Secretary; Alhaji Shehu Shinkafi and the Director for Child Development Mr. Ali Andrews Madugu who represented the Hon. Minister for Federal Ministry of Women Affairs in the presence of members of the UN Agencies, Coalition of Civil Society Organisations. The recommendations were as follows:

1. The Federal Ministry should take steps to rebrand the Campaign Name to suit all-inclusive and respond to the needs on the ground especially the traditional/religious leaders thus #KeepingGirlsInSchool.
2. The Federal Government has obligations under African and International human rights law to protect children from being forced into marriages. Hence the Government of Nigeria should consider harmonization its National and States laws to avoid contradictory positions.
3. The Federal Government should ensure that all 36 States have adopted and domesticated the Child Rights and VAPP Acts, and consider strong mechanisms to ensure its effective implementation.
4. The Federal Government to consider establishing One-Stop-Centers for victims and survivors to access all relevant support needed (e.g. Legal services, police/security services, psycho-social counselling, healthcare assistance etc.)
5. The Federal Government should make universal free education for the girl child, accessible and compulsory, at least to the secondary level.
6. The Federal Government should prioritize funding for the Federal Ministry of Women Affairs in order to implement all its activities in eliminating all harmful practices.

The representatives of the Federal Ministry responded in affirmative and committed to informing the Federal Minister accordingly for relevant actions to be taken towards achieving zero Harmful practices by 2030.

For more information:

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