

ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL COUNCIL

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ECOSOCC, Pan African Parliament and civil society unite for gender equality for the advancement of the model law on gender equality in Africa

The Economic, Social, and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC), in its capacity as the Civil Society Organ of the African Union, joined the Pan African Parliament (PAP) on a three-day consultation on July 3, 2023, in Lusaka, Zambia. The consultation was specifically designed to engage and solicit the expertise of civil society in shaping the Legal Framework of the Draft Model Law on Gender Equality in Africa. The overarching objective of the collaborative endeavour was to strengthen and advance the implementation of gender-focused initiatives, declarations, and commitments, including the renowned Protocol of the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa, commonly known as the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights.

The consultations, currently piloted with CSOs based in the Southern African region, served as a pioneering step, setting the stage and establishing the tone for subsequent engagements with other CSOs across the African continent. This process is committed to ensuring the effectiveness of the policy framework of the Model Law on gender equality, thus contributing to the advancement of gender-related endeavours within the African Union.

Given the contextual backdrop, despite the substantive content and legal obligations enshrined within the Maputo Protocol, and considering the recently concluded African Women's Decade (AWD) 2010-2020, which underscored a grassroots-oriented strategy for promoting gender equality and empowering women, the current state of gender equality across the continent reveals the lamentable shortcomings in implementing both the Maputo Protocol and domestic gender laws at national levels.

Speaking during the opening ceremony of the joint consultations, the distinguished Honorable Mariam Dao Gabala, Chairperson of PAP on Gender, Family, Youth, and People with Disabilities, emphasised the significance of engaging with civil society and highlighted the precarious state of gender equality in Africa and further recognized the pivotal role CSO engagement plays in advancing the objectives of the Model Law.

She stressed the importance of leveraging ECOSOCC's mandate to ensure that CSOs actively participate in AU programs and initiatives concerning critical issues that significantly impact sustainable development and the effectiveness of the AU's Agenda 2063.

“This meeting serves as a unique opportunity for CSOs to partake in the proceedings of the PAP on the Draft Model Law on Gender Equality, thus fostering a bottom-up approach to decision-making processes, ultimately promoting a more inclusive and comprehensive approach to addressing pertinent challenges on the continent,” Hon. Gabala said.

In line with the views expressed by the esteemed Hon. Gabala, Zambian Parliamentarian, Hon. Marriam Chonya-Chinyama gave due recognition to the commendable efforts undertaken in Zambia at the national level to promote gender equality. However, she made a resounding call for intensified endeavours both at the national and continental levels to ensure the rights of women and girls are safeguarded and upheld.

Subsequent to the preceding statements, Ms. Estelle Nkounkou, Legal Officer of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights delivered enlightening presentations centred around the challenges and opportunities linked to domestic legislations and policy practices concerning Gender Equality. Her discerning insights shed light on critical aspects that demand close attention within this context.

Continuing the discourse, Mr Clement Phebe Mavungu, PAP Legal Officer, provided further clarification on the formulation of the Model Law on Gender Equality and Equity. His presentation encompassed comprehensive theoretical frameworks and presented a preliminary roadmap to guide the implementation and integration of the model law by AU member states.

During the course of deliberations, civil society voiced concerns pertaining to the effectiveness of reporting and accountability mechanisms, as well as the prompt implementation of gender equality policies and laws. In this regard, CSOs underlined the imperative of establishing a robust reporting mechanism for the Model Law to ensure that the challenges encountered in reporting the Maputo Protocol are not repeated, thereby maximizing its effectiveness. In addition, civil CSOs expressed eager anticipation regarding the Model Law, emphasizing its crucial role in genuinely reflecting the on-the-ground realities and incorporating constructive feedback and recommendations from CSOs across the entire value chain, from design to implementation.

This endeavour presented a unique and unparalleled opportunity for AU member states to accelerate the implementation of the Maputo Protocol, which is widely recognized as a progressive and comprehensive human rights instrument, meticulously safeguarding the rights of women and girls throughout Africa. In the same vein, the civil society engagement on the legal framework of the draft model law on gender equality in Africa provides an essential platform for CSOs to collectively channel their voices, advocating for and amplifying the voices of women and girls.

Undoubtedly, this concerted effort addresses a multitude of challenges, encompassing the protection of rights, the cessation of violence against women, the eradication of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital mutilation, the promotion of political participation, and the advancement of economic empowerment. The significant participation of CSOs in shaping the Model Law holds immense potential to create transformative impact, ushering in positive change throughout the continent. Their valuable contributions are poised to bring about substantial advancements and improvements in various aspects related to gender equality, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable society.

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About ECOSOCC

The Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ECOSOCC) was established in July 2004 as an Advisory Organ composed of different social and professional groups of AU Member States. The mandate of ECOSOCC is to contribute, through advice, to the effective translation of the objectives, principles and policies of the African Union into concrete programmes, as well as the evaluation of these programmes.

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