



African Union kicks off a series of commemorative activities on the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of women in Africa.

The African Union has kicked off a series of activities to commemorate the 20th anniversary of the [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#) popularly known as Maputo Protocol. The activities are focused on reflections on the advancements of women rights on the continent in the last 20 years with focus on the achievements, existing and emerging challenges, and opportunities to accelerate the implementation of commitments to women and girls. As of July 2023, forty-four (44) member states had ratified the Protocol. Eleven (11) states are yet to ratify, three years after the commitment to a universal ratification by 2020. These are Botswana, Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Somalia and Sudan.

Lead by the African Union Commission Directorate of Women, Gender and Youth, the commemorative activities kicked off in Nairobi, Kenya on the 10-11 July 2023 setting the momentum for the year-long activities that will provide a catalytic approach to ensure the rights of women across the continent are respected.

While recognizing the tremendous achievements by women's rights movements on the continent, H.E. Dr Monique Nsanzabaganwa, Deputy Chairperson of the African Union Commission called on all the stakeholders to remain relentless in strengthening the gender equality. She noted, "Africa's future is heavily dependent on women's rights. The promotion of women's rights will help foster a successful Africa. The African Union Commission remains committed to ensuring gender equality and women's empowerment. We also recognize members of civil society, who despite all odds, continue to remind us of our obligations to make the Maputo Protocol a living document for the women and girls of Africa."

Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, observed that the 20th anniversary is yet another opportunity to amplify the voices of women, particularly those whose rights remain neglected in the gender rights process. "The laws and customs that promote patriarchy should also be looked at. This requires governments, traditional leaders, and Civil Society Organizations to come on board and ensure that the rights of women are not compromised. The issue of Female Genital Mutilation still exists and should be addressed. We should try to eliminate rules and processes that affect the rights of women. High rates of maternal

mortality, gender inequality, and digital violence are challenges faced by women. Women are also deprived in the digital world. The digital divide is an area of concern that needs to be addressed.”

H.E. Aisha Jumwa, Kenya’s Cabinet Secretary, Ministry of Public Service, Gender, and Affirmative Action, equally observed that despite the positive efforts made, the persistent challenges, including female genital mutilation and violence against women, remain. She, however, noted that progress has been made in advancing women’s rights and gender equality. “As we celebrate the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa, I must commend Namibia, Rwanda, and South Africa for their significant progress in closing the gender gap, with over 70% achievement. I urge other Member States to take inspiration from these countries and follow suit in implementing measures to promote gender equality and women's rights. 80% of Member States, which represents 44 countries, have ratified the Protocol, I call upon the remaining countries to follow suit and ratify the Protocol.”

Awa Ndiaye Seck, UN Women Special Representative to the African Union and UNECA, noted that the ratification of the Maputo Protocol by the 44 Member States is a powerful demonstration of political will, a willingness to acknowledge that there are inequalities and that it is the responsibility of government to ensure that gender gaps as a result of inequality, are bridged. “We have witnessed the adoption of robust legal frameworks to prevent, protect and respond to violence against women as well as improved access to health services, including reproductive health and rights. More girls and women have also enrolled in formal education institutions and have pursued innovation and technology as their career pathways. We commend the African Union for the exemplary leadership it set by prioritizing actions around maternal health, ending child marriage and female genital mutilation, addressing the impact of conflicts on women and girls, enhancing women’s role at the peace table.”

Eunice Ipingi, the President of the Pan African Women’s Organisation, while recognizing the struggle for gender equality over the years, emphasized the importance of transforming challenges into opportunities for innovative solutions to advance the advocacy of the rights of women. “The 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol serves as a significant occasion not only to reflect on past achievements but also as a call-to-action for all stakeholders to stand together and work towards achieving the aspirations for women on the continent. We have made achievements made in entrepreneurship and politics across the continent, albeit with some challenges. We must also increase investments in education, healthcare, financial and economic inclusion for women and youth.”

Faiza Jama Mohamed, Africa Office Director, Equality Now, underscored the importance of acknowledging and uplifting African women, recognizing their contributions towards a more inclusive and equitable society. “We must continue to create opportunities and provide a supportive environment for women to thrive. This includes empowering women through access to education, economic resources, and equal participation in decision-making processes. It is important to identify the challenges that still exist and bring together all stakeholders to address them collectively.”

Kenya’s Senator Hon. Catherine Mumma underscored the role of legislators in ensuring the rights of women are protected and the need for collaboration to ensure

the laws relating to women empowerment are implemented and adhered to. “The Maputo Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa speaks to our language, it speaks to the content of Africa. This is a Convention that Member States should take seriously. Kenya has been the lead in implementation and has a good report to show on the progress made in the implementation of the Maputo Protocol. In the passage of the Kenyan Constitution, we domesticated the Maputo Protocol. Our article on non-discrimination clearly defines and sets out guidelines on women rights in Kenya.”

Chantal Kalumbu, from the Dynamique Nationale des Femmes Candidates (DYNAFEC) in the Democratic Republic of Congo, representing the voice of the girls, observed that Africa with the youngest population in the world and with women comprising half of this population, Maputo Protocol promises to bridge the gaps on gender inequalities. “I want to appreciate our founding mothers who ensured the realization of the Maputo Protocol, even for those who were not yet born. To maintain the momentum of the founding mothers, as the youth, we urge member states to revise specific articles of the Maputo Protocol to make it more inclusive and to promote the rights of young women and to provide progress reports on the implementation of the Maputo Protocol.”

During the two-day meeting, the African Union also launched the [African Women’s Decade on Financial and Economic Inclusion](#) (AWD-FEI) 2020-2030 Roadmap and engage AU citizens on accelerating the implementation of the Roadmap; the AU Campaign on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls and kick-off continental consultations and negotiations on the [AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls](#); the [African Leaders Compendium](#) recognizing and celebrating outstanding women on the continent; and the [Maputo Protocol Scorecard Index](#) to accelerate accountability by member states on the implementation of the Maputo Protocol.

Prudence Ngwenya, AU Commission Director of the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate, says the year-long activities will focus on pushing for the implementation of the gender policies, strengthening partnerships, and ensuring every African woman and girl benefit from all these efforts. “We are saying it’s the 3 Ps on raising the bar on policies, partnerships and people.”

Learn more about the 20th anniversary of the Maputo Protocol on the Rights on Women [here](#).