

**COMMEMORATION OF THE 2017 AFRICA  
HUMAN RIGHTS DAY**

***“Enhancing Youth Contribution towards  
Effective Implementation of the Action  
Plan on the Human and Peoples’ Rights  
Decade in Africa”***

**Addis Ababa**

**21 October 2017**

**Speeches of Mme. Letty Chiwara,  
UN Women Representative to Ethiopia,  
AU and UNECA**

**Distinguished Ladies and gentlemen,**

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<sup>1</sup> Women’s Rights in Africa

[http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/WomensRightsinAfrica\\_singlepages.pdf](http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/Women/WRGS/WomensRightsinAfrica_singlepages.pdf)

On behalf of UN Women, it is my honor to deliver this statement to you all, celebrating the Commemoration of the 2017 Africa Human Right Day.

1. UN Women acknowledge significant progress that has been made at the regional and national levels towards advancing the human rights of women and girls and ensuring gender equality in Africa. Numerous binding agreements and instrument addressing women’s human rights have been produced and adopted by many African human rights mechanisms. These mainly include<sup>1</sup>,

- The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights;
- The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa – Maputo Protocol;
- The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;
- The Protocol on the Statute of the African Court of Justice and Human Rights; and
- The United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its optional protocol.

2. Accordingly, most African countries have moved forward to amend and/or abolish laws that discriminate against women and girls in areas of political participation, access to land, education, health services, employment and other social welfare services, and that protect women and girls from harmful cultural practices such as early marriage, Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)<sup>2</sup>. As a result, Africa has seen a somewhat decline in maternal mortality rates, increase in gender parity in education and women's political participation and the creation of several implementation mechanisms at the national level such

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<sup>2</sup> Women's Rights in Africa: Challenges for Implementation and Proposals for Accelerated Implementation, UN Women

as gender directorates, gender desks, gender focal points within key ministries within all government sectors<sup>3</sup>.

3. Yet, despite important gains, many African countries are still struggling with translating these progressive laws and policies into reality. The majority of African women and girls continue to face intersecting and gender-based discrimination and cultural barriers, including unequal access to education and opportunities, which suppress their potential for leadership and participation in the society.

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<sup>3</sup> Women's Rights in Africa: Challenges for Implementation and Proposals for Accelerated Implementation, UN Women

4. The evidence shows that in most of Africa<sup>4</sup>,

- Women suffer some of the highest levels of sexual and gender based violence globally further exacerbated during times of conflict and post conflict.
- In Sub-Saharan Africa, about 39% girls are married off before the age of 18 limiting their opportunities to pursue their education and their personal ambitions. Early marriage is also putting them at high risk of HIV/AIDS and sexual and reproductive health problems.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

- More than 200 million girls and women alive today have undergone FGM in 30 countries; over 100 million in Africa alone<sup>5</sup>.
- Despite the drop in maternal mortality rates, African countries still have the highest rates of preventable childbirth and pregnancy related deaths in the world.

5. In a close collaboration with AU to fulfil the Africa Agenda 2063 and its strategy Human and Peoples' Action and Implementation Plan for Africa, UN Women has made a firm commitment towards addressing the

issues related to gender equality and women's empowerment mentioned above.

6. UN Women has played and is still playing a pivotal role in supporting Member States, in coordinating the UN system and in mobilizing civil society, the private sector and other relevant stakeholders in support of the full and effective implementation of CEDAW, the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action and the gender responsive implementation of 2030 Agenda, particularly focusing on promoting the human rights of young women<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>5</sup> [https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-barber/female-genital-mutilation\\_b\\_3716604.html](https://www.huffingtonpost.com/ben-barber/female-genital-mutilation_b_3716604.html)

<sup>6</sup> UN-Women Strategic Plan 2018-2021

7. In partnership with the Special Envoy for Youth, UN Women engages both young women and men across all its priorities and foster opportunities for youth voices on gender equality and women's empowerment at the UN, such as the Commission on the Status of Women Youth Forum. Together with the African Union Commission, UN Women is more than ever supporting ending child marriage, one of the main violation of young girls' rights.

8. Cognizant of the important role of youth for enhancing women's rights,

UN Women also developed CEDAW for Youth in 2016 to

- a. encourage the role of young women in holding their governments accountable to implementing CEDAW as activists and members of society;
- b. monitor whether women's and girls' rights are being respected or being violated; and
- c. advocate for ratification of CEDAW in the countries that have not yet ratified it<sup>7</sup>.

9. To conclude, girls and women have boundless potentials to build a brighter future for themselves, their

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<sup>7</sup> CEDAW for Youth 2016

families, their communities and their countries, working with those governments that are ready to live up to their responsibilities and commitments. But to reap the full benefit of all the existing legal instruments and policies for women and girls in Africa, a serious shift is needed. We all need to focus more on the human rights and the needs of marginalized girls and young women all over Africa.

10. UN Women reaffirms its commitment to support the African Union and AU Member States to ensure that women especially young women are actively engaged in Africa

wide dialogues on all aspects of democracy, governance and human rights in Africa. We will strengthen 'the role of African young women' by ensuring gender equality and parity in all spheres of life and eliminating all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls.

I thank you all for being here today, particularly the young and bright students; we are also counting on you to take the promises and commitments made today and make them realities. I am looking forward to the presentations and deliberations.