

**Opening Statement**

**H.E. Hon Betty Amongi Akena**

**Minister Of Gender, Labour And Social Development – Republic Of  
Uganda**

**On the Occasion:**

**AFRICAN UNION HIGH-LEVEL SIDE EVENT AT CSW 70**

***THEME: EXPANDING OPERATIONALIZATION OF THE AU  
ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK TO STRENGTHEN LEGAL AND  
COMMUNITY JUSTICE SYSTEMS TO PROTECT GIRLS AGAINST  
CROSS-BORDER TRAFFICKING, VIOLATIONS, AND  
EXPLOITATION***

**MARCH 17, 2026, 10:00AM – 12:00PM**

**AU OBSERVER MISSION TO THE UN, NEW YORK**

- **H.E. Ambassador Amma Adomaa Twum-Amoah, AU Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development**
- **H.E. Ambassador Mohamed Edrees, the Permanent Observer of the African, Union (AU) to the United Nations (UN)**
- **Hon. Mary Navicha, Minister of Gender, Children, Disability and Social Welfare, Republic of Malawi**
- **Amb. Liberata Mulamula, African Union Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security**
- **Ms. Cecile Mazzacurati, Gender Programme Liaison Branch- UNFPA HQ**
- **Distinguished Representatives from Member State and Governments**
- **Esteemed Delegates**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is my great honour to represent the Republic of Uganda at this African Union High-Level Side Event of the 70th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women. Uganda is acutely aware that the threats facing our girls are multifaceted and increasingly transnational. We are not dealing with isolated incidents, but with organized networks that move children across borders to escape the reach of national justice systems. In the Ugandan context, we are taking decisive action against a broad spectrum of cross-border violations, including:

- Cross-Border Female Genital Mutilation (FGM): Perpetrators frequently move girls across borders to evade Uganda's strict criminalization of FGM.
- Forced Child Marriage: We see the movement of young girls across borders to facilitate early and forced unions, often driven by harmful social norms and economic pressures.
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation and Online Abuse: The digital age has expanded the reach of traffickers, leading to a rise in online sexual exploitation and the movement of girls for commercial sexual purposes.
- Forced Labour and Domestic Servitude: Some of our girls are trafficked across borders under the guise of employment, only to end up in situations of forced labour or domestic slavery.

Uganda has established a comprehensive legal and strategic framework to protect girls from various forms of exploitation and harmful practices. These laws are often cross-referenced to ensure that a single act of violation can be prosecuted under multiple statutes for maximum protection. Some of the laws and strategies to protect children and girls include:

- The Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Act (2010).
- National Strategy for the Abandonment of FGM.
- The Constitution of Uganda (Article 31) and The Children Act (Cap 59) as amended.
- National Strategy to End Child Marriage and Teenage Pregnancy (2022/2023–2026/2027).
- Online Child Abuse and Information Protection: The Computer Misuse (Amendment) Act (2022).
- Commercial Sexual Exploitation: The Prevention of Trafficking in Persons Act (2009)
- Illegal Adoption and Guardianship

To address the cross-border trafficking and exploitation of girls, Uganda has adopted a comprehensive and multi-layered national response that combines strong legal enforcement, community engagement, and regional cooperation. Our approach recognizes that these violations are rarely confined within national borders, and therefore require coordinated action across institutions, communities, and neighbouring states.

In Uganda, we are strengthening both formal and informal justice mechanisms to ensure what we describe as a continuum of justice for victims. This involves closer integration between the formal legal system and community-based structures, including traditional authorities, faith-based institutions, and local protection actors who often serve as the first line of defence in identifying and preventing harmful practices such as cross-border FGM, forced child marriage, and trafficking. Their proximity to communities allows early detection and intervention before violations escalate.

At the same time, Uganda continues to advocate for stronger regional coordination and the harmonization of legal and policy frameworks across key cross-border corridors. Trafficking networks often exploit gaps between national jurisdictions, and aligning our laws and enforcement mechanisms is critical to disrupting these networks, strengthening investigations, and ensuring the safe repatriation and reintegration of victims.

Recognizing the growing complexity of these crimes, particularly in the digital era, we are also investing in stronger data systems and performance monitoring tools to improve accountability and inform policy decisions. Reliable data on harmful practices, including online sexual exploitation, trafficking, and child marriage, allows us to move beyond anecdotal evidence and adopt more targeted, evidence-based interventions.

Equally important is the continued engagement of community leaders, including traditional and religious authorities, whose influence within communities is essential in challenging harmful norms, promoting child protection, and supporting early reporting of violations such as illegal adoption, forced labour, and sexual exploitation.

Through these measures, Uganda remains committed to strengthening cooperation within regional frameworks and advancing the harmonization of laws and protection mechanisms across key migration and trafficking corridors. Our objective is clear: to ensure that no child falls through gaps created by borders, legal inconsistencies, or weak enforcement.

The protection of the African girl child is our collective responsibility. Let us ensure that the commitments we make here in New York translate into real safety, dignity, and justice for every girl, from our cities to the most remote border communities across our continent.

Thank you.