



INTERSESSION ACTIVITY REPORT

BY

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SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA

PRESENTED AT THE

**79TH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMISSION ON
HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS**

14th May – 3rd June 2024

Banjul, The Gambia

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Rights**

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INTRODUCTION

1. In accordance with Rules 25(3) and 64 of the Rules of Procedure (2020) of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (the Commission) and in line with its **Resolution ACHPR/res.38 (XXV) 99 of 5 May 1999**, I present this Report in my capacity as the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa (the SRRWA). The Report also covers my activities undertaken as a Member of the Commission during the period under review.
2. The Report is organized into **five parts**, each covering different aspects of the activities conducted during the intersession following the 77th Ordinary Session of the Commission held in Arusha, Tanzania, from 19 October - 9 November 2023.
3. The report offers a comprehensive overview of my engagements and activities during the reporting period, structured into five parts. It begins with detailing my contributions as a Member of the Commission, followed by highlights of my role as the SRRWA, including participation in significant events. The third part focuses on Country Monitoring efforts, including actions to address human rights violations and commend progress in specific countries. The fourth part provides insights into the status of women and girls during the intersession period. Finally, the report concludes by summarizing observations and recommendations for consideration.

PART ONE: ACTIVITIES UNDERTAKEN AS A COMMISSIONER

A. Meetings of the African Union Policy-Making Organs

4. In my capacity as the Vice-Chairperson of the Commission, I participated in the following meetings of the AU Policy-Making Organs held between January and February 2024.

The 47th Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representatives Committee

5. From **15 January to 13 February 2024**, I participated in the 74th Ordinary Session of the Permanent Representatives Committee (PRC), which convened virtually.

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The 44th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council

6. From **14 to 15 February 2024**, I participated in the 44th Ordinary Session of the Executive Council, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government

7. From **17 to 18 February 2024**, I participated in the 37th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government (the Assembly), held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

B. Virtual 78th Ordinary Session (Private)

8. From **23 February to 8 March 2024**, I attended the Commission's 78th Ordinary Session (Private) convened virtually to consider Communications, outstanding Reports, and other matters.

C. 1st Joint Forum of Special Mechanisms of the Commission

9. I attended the inaugural Joint Forum of Special Mechanisms of the Commission in Dakar, Senegal, from **25 to 27 April 2024**. This pioneering event convened by the Commission had the theme "*Advancing the protection and promotion of human rights in Africa: Strengthening commitments, overcoming challenges, and reinforcing opportunities.*" It provided a platform for stakeholders to collaborate on cross-cutting issues and engage in joint initiatives recognizing the interdependence of all human rights. The Forum's main objective was to enhance the Commission's intersectional approach to human rights, emphasizing the interconnected nature of all rights.

PART TWO: ACTIVITIES AS SPECIAL RAPPORTEUR ON THE RIGHTS OF WOMEN IN AFRICA

A. Launch of a Joint General Comment on Female Genital Mutilation

10. On **10 November 2023**, I delivered welcoming remarks for launching the Joint General Comment of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) and the Commission, held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. During my welcoming remarks, I emphasized the detrimental impact of Female

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Genital Mutilation (FGM) on the physical and psychological well-being of women and girls. I highlighted the pervasive human rights violations associated with the practice. I also underscored the importance of collaborative efforts to end this harmful traditional practice, citing the joint efforts of the ACERWC and the Commission as an example.

B. Sixth Judicial Dialogue

11. From **20 to 22 November 2023**, I attended the Sixth Judicial Dialogue organized by the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights in Algiers, Algeria, where discussions revolved around the challenges and opportunities of integrating regional and international human rights jurisprudence into domestic courts in Africa.

C. Capacity Building Training for CSOs on the Observer Status and Engagement with the Commission: Special Focus on Women's Rights

12. On **12 December 2023**, I participated in the above virtual capacity-building training Organized by the African Court Coalition, where I facilitated the training and delivered a detailed presentation on the Commission's mandate, procedures for granting observer status, and access to the commission by State Parties, individuals, or NGOs. Additionally, I enlightened the participants about the Commission's efforts in advancing women's rights and popularizing the Maputo Protocol, emphasizing the ongoing need for efforts to achieve substantive equality and ensure effective implementation of its provisions.

D. 11th GIMAC Youth Advocacy Training

13. On **13 February 2024**, I delivered a keynote address at the above event focused on "*Youth-led inclusive educational transformation for gender equity and sustainability*," held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. In my keynote address, I emphasized the pivotal role of education in achieving gender equity in Africa and underscored the importance of youth-led initiatives in driving transformative change. I further highlighted inspiring examples of such initiatives that have significantly promoted gender equity in education.

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E. Public Fireside Chats

14. On **January 16, 2024**, I participated in a public fireside chat on regional human rights mechanisms and associated challenges organized by the UAE's Permanent Committee of Human Rights in Abu Dhabi, UAE.

F. Human Fraternity Majlis

15. On **4 February 2024**, I took part in the 5th -anniversary celebration of the signing of the document on Human Fraternity by His Eminence Ahmed EL-Tayeb, Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Chairman of the Muslim Council of Elders, and His Holiness Pope Francis, Head of the Catholic Church, organized by the Muslim Council of Elders in Abu Dhabi, UAE. During the event, I delivered remarks in a session dedicated to women's leadership, titled "*Women in Leadership: Breaking Barriers and Building an Inclusive Society.*" In my contribution, I emphasized the imperative of dismantling discriminatory practices and norms that restrict women's participation in public spaces and confine them to traditional household roles.

G. Press Statement for the International Women's Day

16. On **8 March 2024**, I published a Press Statement on International Women's Day, celebrated under the theme "*Invest in Women: Accelerate Progress.*". I urged relevant stakeholders to collaborate in eradicating gender-based violence, discrimination, and harmful cultural practices to foster investment in women. Additionally, I emphasized the significance of the AU's 2024 theme, "*Educate and Skill Africa for the 21st Century.*" in shifting focus towards investing in female education as a crucial avenue for progress.

H. International Women's Day 2024 National Conversation: Investing in Women's Safety and Empowerment

12. On **9 March 2024**, I participated as a panelist in an event organized by a consortium of organizations, including the Gambia Chamber of Commerce (GCCCI), PF-Initiative (PFI), and Female Lawyers Association of the Gambia (FLAG), held in Banjul, Gambia. My contribution centered on enhancing law enforcement to safeguard women's safety in public spaces, addressing concerns specific to the Gambia, highlighting accessible legal resources, AU initiatives, and

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legal frameworks to ensure women's safety in public and private domains, and offering recommendations for improvement.

I. The 68 Annual Commission on the Status of Women (CSW68)

13. From **11 to 15 March 2024**, I had the honor of participating at the CSW68 in New York with the generous sponsorship of IPAS. My main involvement revolved around speaking engagements and media interviews, all expertly organized by IPAS. I also attended other meetings, and the subsequent sections provide a detailed overview of the specific activities I engaged in throughout CSW68.

Financing for Safe Abortion to Accelerate Gender Equality (12 March 2024)

14. On **12th March 2024**, I had the privilege of delivering keynote remarks at the event organized by IPAS during the CSW68. In my speech, I emphasized the critical importance of Article 14 of the Protocol to the Maputo Protocol and its General Comment No. 2, specifically focusing on Article 14.1 (a), (b), (c), and (f) as well as Article 14.2 (a) and (c). These provisions play a crucial role in advancing safe abortion practices and combating maternal mortality. Furthermore, I addressed the challenges and opportunities associated with implementing these provisions, highlighting the need for concerted efforts to uphold women's rights across Africa effectively.

Disability Inclusion in SRHR Towards Achieving Gender Equality (12 March 2024)

15. I also took part in the aforementioned event organized by IPAS on **12 March 2024**, where I delivered remarks centered around the inclusion of individuals with disabilities in matters pertaining to sexual, reproductive, and health rights. I placed particular emphasis on addressing the unique challenges encountered by persons with disabilities in their pursuit of sexual and reproductive rights. Moreover, I called for the implementation of inclusive policies, programs, and advocacy initiatives that prioritize the needs and rights of individuals with disabilities

Building political feminist power for abortion access in Francophone Africa

16. On **13 March 2024**, I delivered opening remarks at the above-mentioned event organized by IPAS. In my speech, I emphasized the importance of feminist activism and advocacy

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in shaping policy and legal frameworks prioritizing women's reproductive autonomy and healthcare. I further called for collective action to challenge restrictive laws and societal barriers that hinder women's access to safe abortions while stressing the significance of building political power through effective feminist movements.

EDVAW Platform Internal Meeting

17. On **13 March 2024**, I attended the EDVAW Platform Internal Meeting, which discussed the theme of CSW68 for 2025 and the significance of the EDVAW Platform's engagement, amongst other things. The meeting facilitated discussions on joint activities, early preparations for the Beijing+30 celebrations 2025, and other pertinent issues.

EDVAW Meeting with the Secretary General of the United Nations

18. On **14 March 2024**, I attended the meeting of the EDVAW Platform Members and the Secretary General of the United Nations, where issues surrounding the need to institutionalize the EDVAW Platform and establish a permanent secretariat with sufficient resources were discussed. The meeting served as an opportunity to advocate for increased financial resources and support from the UN to address these funding challenges and establish a permanent secretariat.

Internal Meeting with African Union Women, Youth, and Gender Directorate

19. On **14 March 2024**, I had an internal meeting with the Women Youth and Gender Directorate (WYGD) of the AU, where we discussed collaborative projects focused on ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Maputo Protocol.

CSW 68 Planning Meeting with Gender Directorate and other relevant AU Organs

20. On **14 March 2024**, I participated in the Planning Meeting for CSW68 and an Inter-Ministerial Consultation Meeting on the Common African Position for CSW68, organized by the WYGD. During the meeting, I shared conceived initiatives with the representative of the Women's Caucus and discussed modalities and the way forward.

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EDVAW Meeting with Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Philippines and outgoing Chair of the CSW68

21. On **15 March 2024**, I participated in a meeting between the EDVAW Platform and Ambassador Antonio Manuel Lagdameo, the Permanent Representative of the Republic of the Philippines and outgoing Chair of the CSW. The outcome of this meeting was a shared agreement to conduct planning meetings between the EDVAW Platform and the CSW prior to their annual gathering. These meetings aim to ensure inclusivity and foster the exchange of ideas. The overarching goal of the meeting was to establish a framework for engagement and coordination between the two entities, promoting a more comprehensive and inclusive approach to addressing the pressing issues surrounding violence against women.

EDVAW meeting with Executive Director of UN Women (Represented by the Deputy Executive Director)

22. On **15 March 2024**, I participated in the above meeting, whose primary focus was to ensure the alignment of the activities carried out by different Human Rights Mechanisms within the Platform with the normative and programmatic mandates of UN Women at the national, regional, and global levels. Furthermore, there was a significant discussion regarding the pressing requirement to institutionalize the EDVAW Platform and establish a permanent secretariat with adequate resources. This matter received immediate attention from the responsible body, recognizing the importance of addressing it promptly.

Inter-Ministerial Consultation Meeting for Common Africa Position

23. On **15 March 2024**, I was privileged to attend and deliver opening remarks during the Inter-Ministerial Consultation Meeting for the Common Africa Position. In my speech, I emphasized the importance of upholding the spirit of the Maputo Protocol, particularly amidst emerging controversial rights, while highlighting the ongoing relevance of collective efforts from all stakeholders in safeguarding women's rights. The meeting, attended by Ministers of Gender and Women from across the African continent, served as a platform for collective

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discussions and consultations to shape the Common Africa Position for CSW68, ensuring a unified and cohesive stance on women's rights and gender equality.

Media Interviews

24. Apart from my engagement in the previously mentioned meetings during CSW68, I had the honor of being interviewed by the following media outlets:

- a. On **12 March 2024**, I participated in an interview with Voice of America discussing the relevance of CSW in addressing women's rights within the African context, particularly concerning women in conflict zones and the theme's significance for Africa, given the continent's challenges with poverty, conflict, and widespread violations of women's rights. I emphasized the role of the ACHPR in addressing issues central to the theme.
- b. On **13 March 2024**, I was interviewed by Devex and The Guardian Newspaper UK, delving into topics such as anti-rights movements, the decline of FGM in The Gambia, and broader challenges within sexual and reproductive health and rights. Throughout our discussions, I underscored the pivotal roles of the ACHPR and the SRRWA in confronting these issues. I emphasized the necessity of collective action in protecting these fundamental rights.

J. Regional Consultation for Africa for the elaboration of CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40

25. From **18 to 19 April 2024**, I participated in the Regional Consultation for Africa in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, organized by the CEDAW Committee, focusing on the elaboration of CEDAW General Recommendation No. 40 aimed at achieving equal and inclusive representation of women in decision-making systems.

K. Expert Group Meeting on the Proposed Repeal of FGM Law in Gambia

26. On **April 15, 2024**, I attended a virtual meeting convened by UN Women regarding the parliamentary debate in Gambia to repeal the law criminalizing FGM and its

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implications on women's rights in the country. The outcome of this meeting will be convening a Roundtable discussion, in collaboration with the ACERWC and UN Women, to engage senior women and policymakers in The Gambia on the implications of lifting the ban on FGM in The Gambia and other Member States.

L. Launch of the Human Rights Fellowship Program in Reproductive Justice

27. From **6 to 8 May 2024**, IPAS Francophone invited me to launch the Regional Fellowship Program for Female Human Rights Leaders in Reproductive Justice, which offers valuable opportunities for active involvement with the African human rights system. The program aims to enhance participants' capacity and knowledge while increasing access for Francophone civil society to engage with the Commission and its mandate. It also explores how advocates can effectively utilize these mechanisms to strengthen their work at the national level.

M. Panel on a Resilient and inclusive Africa: building an Inclusive Education system for Increased Access to Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent

28. On **12 May 2024**, I moderated a panel on the aforementioned topic, organized in the margin of the NGO Forum held prior to the 79th Ordinary Session of the Commission by the Global Forum of Communities Discriminated on Work and Descent.

N. Roundtable on the Proposed Repeal of FGM Law in The Gambia and Pushback on Women's Rights and Gender Equality

29. On the margins of this session, I would be hosting a Roundtable dialogue in a collaborative effort with the Special Rapporteur on Harmful Practices, the ACERWC, and the ACHPR Country Rapporteur of The Gambia, in partnership with the UN Women. The purpose of this gathering was to thoroughly examine the consequences of repealing the law prohibiting FGM in The Gambia and the potential broader backlash against women's rights and gender equality. The Roundtable aimed to establish an ad hoc coalition comprising influential local figures, including women leaders, religious leaders, and traditional leaders. This coalition would engage in strategic political activities and collaborate on identifying strategies and actions for collective efforts over

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the next three months with a long-term perspective in mind.

PART THREE: COUNTRY MONITORING

A. Sudan

Joint Letter of Urgent Appeal regarding the escalation of violence against women in the capital Khartoum, Sudan

30. On **28 December 2023**, as the SRRWA and the Commissioner Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in the Republic of Sudan, we jointly sent an urgent appeal letter to His Excellency Gen. Abdel Fattah al-Burhan. The letter highlighted the disturbing prevalence of gender-based violence, including sexual violence, being employed as a tactic of warfare to intimidate, terrorize, and punish women and girls in Khartoum. Drawing from the received reports, we called upon the Sudanese government to promptly, impartially, and effectively investigate these allegations, ensuring accountability for the perpetrators. Furthermore, we urged the government to uphold, protect, and promote the rights of women to live free from all forms of gender-based violence.

B. Sierra Leone

Joint Urgent Appeal concerning the alleged deaths of three girls resulting from FGM and related complications in Sierra Leone

31. On **5 March 2024**, the Country Rapporteur for Human Rights in the Republic of Sierra Leone and I collaborated to send a Joint Urgent Letter of Appeal to H.E. Mr. Julius Maada Wonie Bio. The purpose of this letter was to address the reported deaths of three girls resulting from FGM and its associated complications. Based on the information we received, we emphasized the need for the Sierra Leonean government to take decisive measures against all forms of Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP). Additionally, we urged the government to expedite the enactment of the Child Rights Act 2007, which is currently pending before parliament, and to conduct a thorough investigation into the alleged deaths of the three girls attributed to FGM.

C. Namibia

Statement of condolences on the passing of H.E Dr.

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Hage G. Geingob, President of the Republic of Namibia

32. On **6 February 2024**, fulfilling my responsibilities as the Country Rapporteur on the Human Rights Situation in the Republic of Namibia, I conveyed my deepest condolences on the passing of His Excellency Dr. Hage G. Geingob, the President of Namibia. In my statement of condolences, I took a moment to reflect on President Geingob's remarkable efforts in promoting human rights within Namibia and on a broader scale, particularly his dedication to advancing women's rights. I also expressed sincere gratitude for President Geingob's support of the Commission's promotional missions within the country.

D. Botswana

Joint Letter of Commendation for the ratification of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa

18. On **14 December 2023**, in collaboration with the Country Rapporteur of Botswana, I sent a Letter of Commendation to His Excellency Mokgweetsi Masisi. The letter's purpose was to express our appreciation and recognition for the significant actions taken by the Government of Botswana. Specifically, we commended President Masisi for ratifying the Maputo Protocol on 24 February 2023 and depositing the ratification instrument with the AU Commission on 23 October 2023. This decisive step demonstrated their commitment to promoting and protecting women's rights.

19. Additionally, in the letter, we urged His Excellency to fulfill the reporting obligations outlined in the African Charter and the Maputo Protocol. This included submitting an Initial Report to the Commission two years after the ratification of the Maputo Protocol, as well as a Periodic Report by Articles 62 and 26 of the African Charter and the Maputo Protocol, respectively.

PART FOUR: BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE SITUATION OF WOMEN AND GIRLS IN AFRICA

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33. During the intersession period, I noted the following developments and concerns on the situation of women on the continent:

Botswana

34. In keeping with the theme for International Women's Day in 2024 to invest in women, it is important to assess women's inclusion and equal participation in the economy. It is noted that in Botswana's industry, women still lag, as reported by a survey in February 2024. This indicates that responses from 81% of participants show that the number of women in senior management roles is still low within the country.¹ I do hope that the ratification of the Maputo Protocol by Botswana, which occurred during the intersession, will go a long way towards increasing such statistics in the country.

Central Sahel Region

35. I noted with concern that the Central Sahel region is plagued by gender-based violence. The convergence of armed conflict, climate change, food insecurity, and military takeovers have made the region the hotbed of violations against women.² Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have high levels of instability, which is resulting in forced displacements and humanitarian crises, both of which disproportionately affect women. This is exacerbated by the failure of relief organizations to access some of the most affected regions.³ It is also reported that sexual violence has become a pervasive problem within the armed conflict zones in Northern Burkina Faso. Reports indicate that armed groups in conflict-ridden parts of the country continue to perpetrate sexual violence against civilians, and impunity is contributing to the continuation of these violations.⁴ Sexual violence, whether perpetrated in armed conflict situations or peaceful situations, has a long-term effect that violates several women's rights physically, socially, and psychologically.

Democratic Republic of Congo

¹ <https://www.grantthornton.co.bw/insights/publications/women-in-business-2024/>

² <https://reliefweb.int/report/burkina-faso/addressing-gender-based-violence-central-sahel>

³ As above.

⁴ <https://rflgd.org/2024/01/11/sexual-violence-against-women-and-girls-in-armed-conflict-zones-in-northern-burkina-faso/>

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36. I would like to congratulate the nation of the Democratic Republic of Congo for appointing its first female Prime Minister during the intersession. Women's participation in decision-making systems is important for African states to achieve gender equality. I, however, note that amidst this welcome development, violence continues to escalate in the DRC, which is disconcerting, as women are often disproportionately affected.⁵

Egypt

37. A disturbing trend was noted in Egypt, where mothers who have been granted custody of children during a divorce have had their children kidnapped by the father and taken out of the country. In December 2023, a video circulated showing two girls being drugged and abducted by a gang which included the father.⁶ The kidnapping included physical abuse, drugging, and stripping. It is even more disturbing that such matters are classified as misdemeanors, thereby downplaying the seriousness of the crime.

Eswatini

38. I noted with concern the allegations perpetrated by officials of Eswatini against Tanele Maseko, widow of the late human rights lawyer Thulani Maseko. Several media outlets and human rights organizations have reported the intimidation and harassment that Tanele has been facing, including restrictions on movement, imprisonment, and seizure of her passport and mobile phone.⁷ I strongly condemn the ongoing alleged intimidation and harassment of Tanele, as it constitutes a violation of her fundamental rights and instills fear, which undermines the voices of human rights defenders and advocates.

Ethiopia

⁵ <https://www.africanews.com/2024/04/02/dr-congo-names-first-female-prime-minister-amid-escalating-violence/>

⁶ <https://ecwronline.org/?p=10003>

⁷ <https://www.movedemocracy.org/democracy-alert-tanele-maseko-prominent-eswatini-human-rights-defender-detained-and-harassed-by-eswatini-authorities>

<https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2024/03/eswatini-authorities-must-stop-harassment-and-intimidation-of-tanele-maseko/>

<https://watermarkonline.com/2024/04/03/eswatini-police-detain-prominent-human-rights-activist-lgbtq-ally/>

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39. I noted with concern the ongoing conflict in the Amhara region of Ethiopia, particularly the clashes between the Ethiopian National Defense Forces (ENDF) and the Amhara Militia (Fano), which have led to a significant risk of sexual violence, including rape. According to reports from the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission (EHRC), since July 2023 alone, over 200 cases of rape have been documented in various healthcare facilities.⁸ However, the EHRC also suggests that many more cases are likely to go unreported.

40. This escalation of sexual violence amid conflict is particularly alarming, especially considering the country has not yet fully recovered from the atrocities committed during the Northern conflict, which affected Tigray, Amhara, and Afar regions. The emergence of such conflict-related sexual violence, therefore, threatens to reverse the progress made and represents a significant regression in the efforts to ensure the safety, dignity, and rights of women in Ethiopia.

Gambia

41. I am dismayed by the threat of the regression of women's rights in The Gambia in respect of the banning of FGM. The Gambia has been celebrated as one country that has effectively domesticated the Maputo Protocol. Still, the recent developments have seen parliament debating the reversal of the ban on FGM. FGM has long been proven to be a flagrant violation of women's and girls' rights, and in 2024, we should be on the cusp of worldwide universal banning of the practice.

Kenya

42. I noted with concern the rising number of femicide cases in Kenya. In January 2024, reports indicate that at least 14 women were killed in the country, prompting thousands of women to march in protest against femicide.⁹ The increase in the number of intimate partner violence is worrisome and denotes a society where misogyny is rife, as well as gender inequality.

Sierra Leone

⁸ <https://ehrc.org/%E1%8A%A0%E1%88%9B%E1%88%AB-%E1%8A%AD%E1%88%8D%E1%88%8D-%E1%88%88%E1%8B%88%E1%88%AB%E1%89%B5-%E1%8B%A8%E1%89%80%E1%8C%A0%E1%88%88%E1%8B%8D-%E1%8B%A8%E1%89%B5%E1%8C%A5%E1%89%85-%E1%8C%8D%E1%8C%AD/>

⁹ <https://carnegieendowment.org/2024/02/12/kenyan-women-are-pushing-for-action-on-femicide-they-have-road-map-pub-91607>



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43. The recent reports on the abduction and coerced initiation of girls into the Sande Bush have raised profound concerns. Within the Sand Bush, FGM is allegedly practiced as a mandatory part of the initiation rituals. This deeply ingrained tradition and cultural practice present considerable obstacles to the physical and psychological well-being of the abducted girls who undergo forced initiation. Such practices perpetuate harmful gender norms and flagrantly violate the fundamental human rights of these girls, resulting in enduring physical and psychological damage.

Sudan

44. The conflict in Sudan has persistently heightened the vulnerability of Sudanese women to conflict-related sexual violence. Disturbingly, reports indicate the use of rape as a tactic of war in the Sudan conflict, with countless women and girls falling victim to this abhorrent crime. Such acts not only violate the fundamental rights and dignity of women but also undermine the prospects for peace and stability in Sudan.

Morocco

45. It was encouraging to note that the process has begun to review the Moroccan Family Code, which governs issues such as matrimonial unions, marital dissolution, guardianship, and other aspects of family law. It is hoped that the review will bring the rights of women in the country up to international standards. I also take this opportunity to encourage the nation of Morocco to ratify the Maputo Protocol to enhance the protection of women in the country.

Zimbabwe

46. The 2023 elections in Zimbabwe indicate that women's participation in political processes has declined. There was only one female presidential candidate out of 11 candidates. There was also a decline in the number of female candidates fielded by the major political parties for direct vote.¹⁰

Somalia

¹⁰ <https://theconversation.com/zimbabwes-election-was-a-fight-between-men-women-are-sidelined-in-politics-despite-quotas-212131>

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47. Over the course of many years, the conflict in Somalia has had a profound impact on the lives of women and girls, yet their suffering often goes unnoticed due to the protracted nature of the conflict. Within this context, there are prevalent human rights violations, with sexual violence and harmful traditional practices being particularly widespread, resulting in a significant number of victims being denied access to justice. Despite the alarming prevalence of violations against women's rights, Somalia is one of the ten countries that have not yet ratified the Maputo Protocol. This absence of ratification leaves many women and girls without adequate protection. I would like to take this opportunity to urge Somalia to ratify the Maputo Protocol, as it would significantly enhance the protection of women's rights in the country.

Ratification, Domestication, Implementation, and Reporting of the Maputo Protocol

48. I am pleased to note that Botswana became the 45th African State Party to the Maputo Protocol. This means that only ten outstanding States have yet to ratify. I take this opportunity to encourage the remaining States to consider the value that the instrument brings to the women in their countries and ratify and domesticate it accordingly. The outstanding countries are Burundi, Central African Republic, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, Madagascar, Morocco, Niger, Somalia, and Sudan.

49. Member States' submission of State Reports under the Maputo Protocol is improving but remains far from perfect. I take this opportunity to unequivocally remind states that by becoming party to the Maputo Protocol, they are under an obligation to submit a periodic report under Article 26 of the instrument. Some Member States still opt to submit a report with only Part A on the African Charter, without a report on the Maputo Protocol. Such a report is incomplete. One of the three reports under consideration in this sitting of the African Commission does not contain a report on the Maputo Protocol. It becomes difficult for the Commission and the mandate to have a constructive dialogue with member states on progress made and challenges faced in implementing the Maputo Protocol's provisions and protecting women's rights. Furthermore, some member states have not filed any report on the Maputo Protocol despite ratifying the instrument several years ago.

50. In light of the above, I urge States Parties to the Protocol to promptly submit their Periodic

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Reports under the Maputo Protocol and to utilize the State Reporting guidelines provided. By doing so, States can actively engage in constructive dialogues with the Commission, identify areas of progress, and leverage the Commission's concluding observations for further advancements in women's rights.

PART FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATIONS

To the Member States conducting elections in 2024

51. 2024 is an election year for several Member States in Africa. Therefore, I recommend that the nations going to the polls this year ensure they have the adequate policy and legislative framework to allow equal and meaningful participation of women in the electoral processes of their respective countries.
52. Secondly, they should ensure that the political environment, both during campaigning and elections, is conducive to the participation of women. This is done by curbing violence against female candidates, both online and offline, by imposing deterrent criminal sanctions for it, investigating and prosecuting any such cases.

To the Governments of Sudan, DRC, and the Central Sahel Region

53. I urge these Countries to;
 - Take steps regarding women's rights in conflict situations. Women should be included in peacekeeping processes within those countries and given room to make meaningful contributions;
 - Investigate and prosecute reported cases of violence against women, especially conflict-related sexual violence;
 - Hold perpetrators accountable; and
 - Ensure that there is access to crucial humanitarian services, like sexual and reproductive health products and other relevant services for women and girls, the most vulnerable populations in the conflict, and the internally displaced persons

To the Government of Eswatini

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54. I urge the Government of Eswatini to:

- Implement the required actions to safeguard Mrs. Tanele Maseko from the reported instances of intimidation and harassment she is currently experiencing and
- Guarantee the protection and advancement of human rights for individuals who openly advocate for human rights.

To the Government of Ethiopia

55. I urge the Government of Ethiopia to:

- Swiftly and resolutely address and prevent instances of sexual violence occurring in conflict-affected areas of the Amhara region;
- Ensure the accountability of those responsible for such acts and provide sufficient support and assistance to survivors; and
- Implement comprehensive measures to prevent any further atrocities targeting women and girls in Ethiopia.

To the Government of The Gambia

56. I call on the Government of The Gambia to:

- Ensure that the gains in protecting women's rights are not reversed;
- Discourage the ongoing process that threatens to repeal the anti-FGM law and
- Conduct intensive sensitization campaigns with the pockets of the population who still recognize and practice FGM to curtail the resistance to the operation of the law as it stands.

To the Government of Kenya

57. I recommend that the Government of Kenya;

- Take seriously the rising rate of femicide in the country by investigating its root causes and addressing them; and
- Investigate and prosecute the reported cases in a swift manner that delivers justice and deters any would-be offenders.

To the Government of The Sudan

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58. I urge the Government of the Sudan to:

- Promptly and decisively intervene to prevent instances of conflict-related sexual violence from occurring against women and girls;
- Conduct thorough investigations into cases of sexual violence, ensuring that perpetrators are brought to justice and held accountable for their reprehensible actions and
- Implement comprehensive measures to prevent any further atrocities targeting women and girls in Sudan.

To the Government of Sierra Leone

59. I urge the Government of Sierra Leone to:

- Investigate and hold perpetrators accountable for the alleged abduction and forced initiation of girls into the Sande Bush;
- Ensure that culture is not used as justification for committing harmful traditional practices that adversely affect the well-being of women and girls in Sierra Leone and
- Ensure that girls in Sierra Leone are protected from undergoing FGM.

The Government of Somalia

60. I urge the Government of Somalia to:

- Ensure the protection of women and girls in the country from violence, including conflict-related sexual violence; and
- Take necessary steps to ratify the Maputo Protocol.

CONCLUSION

61. This inter-session report provides an overview of the activities carried out during my tenure as the SRRWA and as the Commissioner Rapporteur for specific countries. It also highlights the persistent challenges faced by women and girls across Africa.

62. Despite notable advancements in promoting and safeguarding women's rights within Member States, as evidenced by the ratification of crucial instruments like the Maputo Protocol, the practical realization of these rights remains challenging. A significant gap exists between legal frameworks and their effective

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implementation, often due to systemic obstacles such as a lack of political will and deeply ingrained cultural norms that perpetuate gender inequality and discrimination.

63. Furthermore, women and girls continue to bear a disproportionate burden of the consequences of conflicts, including heightened vulnerability to gender-based violence, displacement, and limited access to essential services like healthcare and education. The use of rape and sexual violence as weapons of war further compounds their suffering, leaving lasting scars on individuals and communities. Harmful practices like FGM, often justified by religious and traditional beliefs, also have far-reaching impacts on African women, leaving survivors without recourse to justice.
64. Addressing these challenges necessitates concerted efforts at various levels. Member States must prioritize the protection and empowerment of women, both during peacetime and in conflict situations. CSOs also play a crucial role in advocating for women's rights and holding governments accountable to their international legal commitments. Additionally, the international community should continue to support initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and empowering women in Africa through targeted funding, capacity-building, and technical assistance.
65. The SRRWA remains fully committed to fulfilling its mandates and advancing the core objectives of the Mechanism. In our ongoing efforts to champion the promotion and protection of women's rights, it is essential to acknowledge the pivotal role played by Partner Organizations in facilitating these endeavors. Therefore, I sincerely thank these invaluable partners for their unwavering financial and technical support, which significantly enhances the success of our initiatives.
66. In conclusion, two decades after adopting the Maputo Protocol and a quarter-century since the establishment of the SRRWA mandate, I sincerely hope that our continent has reached a consensus on the crucial importance of women's rights for the development of our nation. Women deserve to live their lives with dignity, free from discrimination. This consensus must be reflected in the implementation of gender-transformative laws, policies, administrative measures, and other actions taken by governments to promote the well-being of their citizens.

67. The primary purpose of this mandate is to assist

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Member States in achieving this goal. Therefore, I extend my hand again to all Member States, urging them to actively engage with the mandate and strategize on the most effective approaches to realize it. I emphasize the value the mandate and the Commission place on strategic partnerships in this vital work. Let us all work together towards the shared objective of ensuring that the women of Africa can fully realize their potential.

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