

Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity.

"Galvanizing Positive Masculinity to end the scourge of violence in Africa."

#AfricaEndingVAWG

#PositiveMasculinity

25th November 2021.

TAB ONE- About the Men's Conference on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls.

The persistence of Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) in Africa is mainly associated with gender power relations reflected in well and commonly ascribed and accepted social norms, entrenched in patriarchal systems characterized by male dominance, unequal distribution of resources and power combined with social institutions that sustain gender inequality. These norms in the name of culture, dictate behaviours and attitudes that perpetuate stereotypes which are the most significant barriers to eliminating and preventing VAWG and have an inter- generational impact. Involving men leaders to engage other men can make a key contribution in changing attitudes and in transforming structural and institutional inequalities that contribute to VAWG.

Despite decades of efforts, particularly from women and women's organisations, VAWG in Africa remains the most widespread and socially tolerated of human rights violations, cutting across borders, race, class, ethnicity and religion. The vast majority of this violence is perpetrated by men, especially against women and girls, and while most men may never use or condone the use of violence, the fact is that men are overwhelmingly the perpetrators of VAWG. In this regard, involving men in leadership to engage other men and boys in efforts to end VAWG is not only necessary, but also critical to transforming structural and institutional inequalities that lead to VAWG.

The African Union categorizes Violence Against Women and Girls as one of the most egregious forms of discrimination and a critical impediment to women's realization of their fundamental human rights. The AU's Agenda 2063, in Goal 17 of Pillar 6, identifies ending violence and discrimination against women and girls as one of its priority areas to achieve full gender equality in all spheres of life in Africa.

TAB TWO- The scourge and reality of violence against women and girls in Africa.

In 2020, Africa and the world at large experienced an unprecedented surge in Violence Against Women and Girls as a result of the lockdown and movement restrictions to contain the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. Labelled the "shadow pandemic", it was estimated that for an average lockdown duration of three (3) months, there would be an additional 15 million cases of VAWG, 31 million for an average of six (6) months, 45

million for an average of nine (9) months and 61 million if the average lockdown period extends up to one (1) year.

Across Africa in particular, gender data showed exacerbated gender inequalities under COVID-19, placing women and girls at greater risk of VAWG. There has been a clear rise in VAWG over this period, with both different and similar manifestations in many countries during the lockdowns necessitated by the pandemic. COVID-19 responses have not only contributed to the sharp increase of VAWG, they have also amplified the deep-seated structural inequities that feed and continue to provide a fertile ground for VAWG.

In Africa, the most prevalent forms documented include, among others intimate partner violence (IPV) , which manifests as physical, sexual psychological or economic violence by an intimate partner; Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which is a common cultural practice in some parts of Africa; Early Child and Forced Marriage where girls below 18 years are forced into marriage; Sexual Violence in Conflict (SVC) and Humanitarian settings which includes rape, sexual assault with violent physical assault, kidnapping, sexual slavery and forced prostitution in conflict situations. Women and girls also face sexual harassment and violence in the work place, in schools and in other public spaces.

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Sexual Violence in Conflict and Humanitarian settings remains one of the debilitating factors affecting women and girls in countries undergoing or coming out of conflict. It is also one of the impediments to the effective implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the AU Women, Peace and Security Agenda. While fighting impunity against perpetrators of SVC and Humanitarian settings, progressive men in leadership should be involved to engage other men to fight SVC and Humanitarian Settings and also involve them as partners in the adoption and implementation of UNSCR 1325 National Action Plans (NAPs) across the continent. Currently Africa has 30 Member States and Six (6) Regional Economic Communities/Mechanisms which have adopted APs. Yet, Women are still poorly represented in peace processes including in mediation or in negotiating teams. To end sexual violence in conflict and humanitarian settings, it is important to include women in peace processes and to integrate gender perspectives and women's concerns in peace agreements.

TAB THREE- Ending violence against women and girls in Africa.

AU Member States have made tremendous strides in developing and implementing comprehensive legal, policy and institutional responses to VAWG. Specific laws addressing

rape, sexual violence in conflict, domestic violence, Harmful Traditional Practices (HTPs) have been enacted; national gender policies and national action plans on VAWG and on Women Peace and Security have been adopted; and the issue remains on the priority list of national, regional and continental Agendas. In addition, several initiatives exist to fight against specific forms of VAWG initiated by the AU, UN and other international or local Civil Society Organisations. These include, among others the AU Campaign to End Early Child Marriage; the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate VAWG; the Unite Campaign; the Campaign on Accelerated Reduction on Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA); the Red Card Campaign to end VAWG and the UN Trust Fund to End VAW. The AUC will soon launch the AU Campaign to End Violence Against Women and Girls in Africa.

Despite the progress and concerted programmes undertaken at different levels, VAWG remains a devastating pandemic that threatens women and girls' lives and national developments. This demands accelerated action to galvanise all sectors of society to actively participating in efforts towards eradicating the scourge. Men in leadership have a particularly key role to play in influencing other men, given the fact that it is men who overwhelmingly perpetrate VAWG, and they would be able to redirect this tide. Similarly, they can play a key role in providing alternative role models for boys and young men and in engaging other men in leadership to agree on creative and sustainable strategies to prevent and end VAWG in Africa.

Equally important in the fight against VAWG is financing. The continued insufficient funding for services to end VAWG such as telephone advisory lines or free helplines, shelters or homes for survivors, legal assistance, medical care services and psychological support hamper efforts to address this scourge. Member States should be encouraged to rapidly scale-up spending on projects to prevent VAWG if Africa is to meet its goals under Agenda 2063. Therefore, it might be prudent to mount a continental multi-sectorial funding initiative to coordinate national responses to VAWG and to support women survivors in crises and conflict settings. This might also be a good opportunity to unify and align all existing efforts to leapfrog what works and close existing financing gaps.

TAB FOUR- Objectives and Expected Outcomes of the Conference.

Male leaders on the continent, recognizing the disproportionate level of male responsibility for VAWG, are mobilized to play a key role in supporting and driving efforts towards the eradication of VAWG on the continent. The overall focus of the Men's Conference is to mobilise commitment and galvanise action by men in leadership to accelerate the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls in Africa at all spheres and at all levels.

The specific objectives are to:

- Adopt a declaration with concrete actions and strategies to enhance men's leadership and role towards ending VAWG, in their various capacities.

- Secure political commitment to develop, adopt, ratify, domesticate and implement the AU Convention on Ending VAWG.
- Secure commitment to create enabling environments to ensure an increase in the numbers of women in leadership at all levels, including as heads of state, government and other sectors to take this agenda forward.
- Create political ownership of the AU Campaign on ending VAWG at national level.
- Mobilise resources through a dedicated Fund for ending VAWG.

The expected outcomes are:

- Deeper understanding and personal commitment to end VAWG by male leaders in the continent developed.
- Political commitment to adopt and ratify the VAWG convention secured.
- Buy-in for the AU VAWG Campaign to be launched and implemented at national levels received.
- Declaration with a call to action adopted, that will list actions that states, businesses, male leaders in faith communities, male leaders in civil society structures and wider community can take in their professional and personal lives, including in the rearing of children.
- A *Circle of Champions* established to target and expand the number of Heads of State and male leadership in the region actively involved in ending VAWG and promoting women's leadership.
- A Continental Men's Coalition to end VAWG and a Men's Portal to report on actions taken to give effect to the Declaration established.
- Financial pledges mobilised and an AU VAWG Fund established

TAB FIVE- Make a difference, end violence against women and girls.

The African Union Commission led by the Women, Gender and Youth Directorate and through their close collaboration with UN Women Agency, aligns with the following call on to make a difference.

Here are just ten ways you can make a difference, safely and with impact.

1. Listen to and believe survivors

Believe survivors. When someone shares their story of violence, they take the first step to breaking the cycle of abuse. It's on all of us to give them the safe space they need to speak up and be heard.

It's important to remember that when discussing cases of sexual violence, a victim's sobriety, clothes, and sexuality are irrelevant. The perpetrator is the sole reason for assault and must bear the responsibility alone. Call out victim-blaming and counter the idea that it's on women to avoid situations that might be seen as "dangerous" by traditional standards.

Survivors of violence are speaking out more than ever before, and everyone has a role to play to ensure they can have justice.

Don't say, "Why didn't she leave?"

Do say: "We hear you. We believe you. We stand with you."

2. Teach the next generation and learn from them

The examples we set for the younger generation shape the way they think about gender, respect and human rights. Start conversations about gender roles early on, and challenge the traditional features and characteristics assigned to men and women. Point out the stereotypes that children constantly encounter, whether in the media, on the street or at the school, and let them know that it's OK to be different. Encourage a culture of acceptance.

Talk about consent, bodily autonomy and accountability to boys and girls, and also listen to what they have to say about their experience of the world. By empowering young advocates with information, and educating them about women's rights, we can build a better future for all.

3. Call for responses and services fit for purpose

Services for survivors are essential services. This means that shelters, hotlines, counseling and all support for survivors of gender-based violence need to be available for those in need, even during the coronavirus pandemic. Every year, the 16 Days of Activism campaign calls for united, global action to end all forms of violence against women and girls.

As the African Union advocates for Gender Responsive Responses to ensure the rights of women are protected and promoted during the pandemic. Governments are called upon to bridge funding gaps to address violence against women and girls, ensure essential services for survivors of violence are maintained during this crisis, implement prevention measures, and invest in collecting the data necessary to adapt and improve life-saving services for women and girls.

4. Understand consent

Freely given, enthusiastic consent is mandatory, every time. Rather than listening for a "no," make sure there is an active "yes," from all involved. Adopt enthusiastic consent in your life and talk about it.

Phrases like "she was asking for it" or "boys will be boys" attempt to blur the lines around sexual consent, placing blame on victims, and excusing perpetrators from the crimes they have committed.

While those that use these lines may have fuzzy understandings of consent, the definition is crystal clear. When it comes to consent, there are no blurred lines.

5. Learn the signs of abuse and how you can help

There are many forms of abuse and all of them can have serious physical and emotional effects. If you're concerned about a friend who may be experiencing violence or feels unsafe around someone, review these signs and learn about the ways to help them find safety and support.

If you think someone is abusing you, help is available. You are not alone. If you'd like to talk with a trained advocate at a helpline.

6. Start a conversation

Speak out. Violence against women and girls is a human rights violation that's been perpetuated for decades. It's pervasive, but it's not inevitable, unless we stay silent. Show your solidarity with survivors and where you stand in the fight for women's rights by demanding an end to violence against women and girls and more accountability.

7. Stand against rape culture

Rape culture is the social environment that allows sexual violence to be normalized and justified, fueled by the persistent gender inequalities and attitudes about gender and sexuality. Naming it is the first step to dismantling rape culture. Every day we have the opportunity to examine our behaviours and beliefs for biases that permit rape culture to continue. Think about how you define masculinity and femininity, and how your own biases and stereotypes influence you.

From the attitudes we have about gender identities to the policies we support in our communities, we can all take action to stand against rape culture.

8. Fund women's organizations

Donate to local organizations that empower women, amplify their voices, support survivors, and promote acceptance of all gender identities and sexualities. The African Union Commission, just like the UN Women works with women's organizations everywhere to end violence against women, assist survivors, and secure equal rights for women and girls everywhere.

9. Hold each other accountable

You are not alone. Violence can take many forms, including sexual harassment in the workplace and in public spaces. Take a stand by calling it out when you see it: catcalling, inappropriate sexual comments and sexist jokes are never okay. Create a safer environment for everyone by challenging your peers to reflect on their own behaviour and speaking up when someone crosses the line, or by enlisting the help of others if you don't feel safe. As always, listen to survivors and make sure they have the support they need.

10. Know the data and demand more of it.

To effectively combat violence against women and girls, we need to understand the issue. Relevant data collection is key to implementing successful prevention measures and providing survivors with the right support. As violence against women and girls has spiked during COVID-19, the gaps in gender sensitive data collection have become more glaring than ever. Call on your government to invest in the collection of data on violence against women and girls.

TAB SIX- Participation at the Men's Conference on Positive Masculinity.

This first AU Men's Conference on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls will be convened, under the leadership of H.E. Felix Antoine Tshisekedi Tshilombo, President of the Democratic Republic of Congo and the AU 2021 Chairperson in collaboration with H.E. Cyril Ramaphosa President of the Republic of South Africa and the 2020 AU Chairperson; H.E. Macky Sall, President of the Republic of Senegal and the 2022 AU Chairperson and H.E. Nana Dankwa Akuffo-Addo, President of the Republic of Ghana and the AU Leader on Gender Development Issues in Africa; H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat, the AU Commission Chairperson; and the African Women Leaders Network (AWLN) under the leadership of its Patron, H.E. Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, former President of the Republic of Liberia; AU Commission's Women, Gender and Youth Directorate (WGYD), the Office of the Special Envoy on Women, Peace and Security (OSE on WPS) the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development (HHSD) and the Department of Political Affairs, Peace and Security (PAPS) and the UN Women.

The Conference will be preceded by stakeholder consultations to solicit the inputs of African citizens and to ensure that their views are integrated in the outcomes and decisions of the Conference. In this regard, five consultations will be held with young men, traditional and religious leaders, private sector, women and policy makers. An online survey will be conducted to extend the reach of the consultations.

The Conference Targets African men in leadership, who will also serve as role models for other men to join the fight against VAWG in Africa. Specifically, the Conference will attract:

- AU Heads of State and Government
- Male politicians and senior government leaders
- Men in leadership in business and the private sector
- Traditional and Religious Leaders
- Male leaders of the academia
- Male leaders in the entertainment industry and Sports
- Leading male journalists
- Leaders of men's organisations/ movements
- Male Youth leaders (including boys under age of 18)
- Civil Society leaders
- UN Agencies
- Development Partners

A continuous engagement with AU citizens will be extended through a comprehensive Advocacy and Media campaign to ensure that their voices are heard and concerns are integrated in the pre, during and post-conference action plans.

TAB SEVEN - Format of the conference.

The Conference will be held using a hybrid modality Conference on 25th November 2021 to be held in Kinshasa

The high level conference is preceded by a virtual Stakeholder Consultations with young men, traditional and religious leaders, civil society, private sector, women and policy makers.

The Conference will be conducted in five AU official languages i.e. Arabic, English, French, Portuguese and Spanish. It will be broadcast on the AUC media platforms and local television.

TAB EIGHT- Resource and Reference materials.

- [AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment 2018-2028.](#)
- [Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#)
- [The Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa](#)
- [2010-2020 African Women's Decade](#)
- [Guidelines for state reporting under the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa](#)
- [AU Guidelines on Gender Responsive Responses to COVID-19](#)
- [Declaration: African Union Civil Society Organisations Consultation Meeting on Accelerating Actions Against the Impact of COVID-19 on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment](#)
- [16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence.](#)

Open Tab- for further information, contact;

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