

SEMINAR CONCLUSIONS

Towards a Parliamentary Strategy for African Women's Rights and Gender Equality – Uniting parliamentary efforts to end violence against women and girls in Africa

EU Presidency Seminar

SENATE of Belgium, Brussels, Belgium

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Address: Belgium Senate, Nation place 1, 1009 Brussels, Belgium

We, the 200 African and European participants of the Brussels AWEPA Seminar entitled: 'Towards a Parliamentary Strategy for African Women's Rights and Gender Equality – Uniting parliamentary efforts to end violence against women and girls in Africa' on 22 October 2010, in the presence of the representatives of parliaments of European and African states, the United Nations and civil society, are determined to strengthen our shared commitment to end violence against women and girls in Africa and Europe and to translate this commitment into enhanced action.

Violence against women and girls persists in every country in the world as a pervasive violation of human rights and a major impediment to achieving gender equality. Such violence is unacceptable, whether perpetrated by the state and its agents or by family members or strangers, in the public or private sphere, in times of peace or in times of armed conflict. As long as violence against women and girls continues, we cannot claim to be making real progress towards equality, development and peace.

States have an obligation to protect women and girls from violence, to hold perpetrators accountable and to provide justice and remedies to victims. The knowledge base and tools to prevent and eliminate violence against women and girls developed over the past decade must be utilized more systematically and effectively.

Significant work has been undertaken by states, several entities of the United Nations, NGOs, women's groups and networks and researchers. International legal and policy frameworks for addressing such violence have been established.

We express our appreciation for the progress achieved in the UN Secretary General's 2008-2015 campaign "UNite to End Violence Against Women", through the development of a framework for action outlining five key outcomes to be achieved along with Millennium Development Goals 3 and 5 by 2015. This is supported, inter alia, by the UN Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM part of UN Women) social mobilization and advocacy platform "Say NO to violence against women", the United Nations inter-agency initiative "Stop Rape Now: United Nations Action Against Sexual Violence in Conflict" and the regional components of the campaign.

The adoption of the UN Security Council Resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888 and 1889 on Women, War and Peace are milestones for the achievement of gender equality and for combating violence against women and girls.

At the same time there is a lot that remains to be done to create an environment where women can live free from gender-based violence. Progress in the development of international legal norms and policies has not been accompanied by comparable progress in their implementation at the national level.

Therefore, given the need for urgent and sustained action to end violence against women and girls, and given the notice that specific attention is needed in Africa on Female Genital Mutilation and women in armed conflicts, and stressing the key role of parliaments and parliamentarians in preventing and eliminating violence against women and girls, we:

Introduction:

1. Call upon parliaments to give priority to and raise awareness regarding the causes and impact of violence against women and girls in general and Female Genital Mutilation and women and girls in armed conflict more specifically;
2. Urge governments and parliaments to ratify international and regional instruments pertaining to violence against women and girls, and to ensure full compliance with those instruments and with pertinent United Nations resolutions in national law and in implementation;

On Female Genital Mutilation

3. Call upon parliaments to scale up their efforts to stop Female Genital Mutilation and request their governments to join the global programme “Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change” launched by UNFPA and UNICEF to abandon Female Genital Mutilation in one generation and to push their governments encouraging UN Resolutions and abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation;
4. Call upon parliamentarians to fulfill their legislative role by creating a human rights and legislative framework which supports abandonment of all forms off Female Genital Mutilation and supports policies to stimulate incentives for abandonment;
5. Call upon parliaments to advocate for a community-based approach and prevention strategy, which works with women, civil society, traditional chiefs and religious leaders, women’s and youth movements, health personnel, teachers and local government to ensure a unified approach in working towards the abandonment of Female Genital Mutilation, and together with governments, to take measures to raise awareness regarding the issue, and empower women;

6. Call upon parliaments to stimulate and engage in public discussion and debate that highlight the benefits of abandoning all forms of Female Genital Mutilation and provide visibility and give support to those groups and communities that have decided to abandon the practice, thereby encouraging abandonment by all;

On violence in situations of armed conflict:

7. Request parliaments to promote full and effective implementation of UN Security Council Resolutions 1325 (2000), 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009) and 1889 (2009), and CEDAW (Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, 1979), and call for adoption of the indicators of the UN Secretary General, more specifically to ensure this implementation by drafting national action plans which promote women's leadership and participation, women's human rights and protection against violence, including systems to monitor and report violence against women and girls in armed conflict, which describe concrete programs and which foresee enough resources to implement the action plan;
8. Call upon parliaments and governments, when reviewing their policy to end violence against women, to assure equal participation of women by aiming at equal decision making processes, more participation of women in parliaments, peacekeeping forces, police and diplomacy, and to include the voice of civil society, local communities, women with disabilities and women's movements when drafting or reviewing the national action plan on 1325 (see annex 1);
9. Call upon parliaments to enact better protection of civilians, particularly of women and children, and monitor the enforcement of legislation against the perpetrators of violent practices and acts of violence against women and children, including tough and clear measures to combat recidivism, stop impunity from prosecution, and providing affordable legal services;
10. Call upon governments to ensure prevention of violence by making information (including early warning systems and inter-institutional dialogue), education and training on gender-related violence available to all public agents, especially police forces and the judiciary involved in the prevention of violence against women and girls and in the provision of health care and support services for victims, and address the role of men in society and the empowerment of women to be agents of change;

Role of AWEPA:

11. AWEPA is requested to prioritize the issue of violence against women and girls, with a special emphasis on Female Genital Mutilation and violence against women and children in armed conflict. AWEPA should mainstream this issue in all partnerships and programs in Africa using the structures and network of AWEPA to raise awareness and to share good parliamentary practices for mutual learning in order to stop violence against women and girls;
12. AWEPA is requested to organise an inter-parliamentary dialogue in the Great Lakes Region and the Horn of Africa, regarding violence against women and girls in conflict areas;
13. AWEPA is requested to organize an inter-parliamentary dialogue among countries heavily-affected by violence against women and girls and harmful traditional practices, focusing on Female Genital Mutilation
14. AWEPA is requested to secure funding from European governments, with the support of European parliaments, in order to implement the above action points.