

CAL Statement to the 59th session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights on Access to Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights.

Madame Chairperson, Honourable Commissioners,

In this **African Women's Decade**, and the **Africa Year of Human Rights with Particular Focus on the Rights of Women**, along with the ongoing **African Commission's Campaign for the Decriminalisation of Abortion in Africa**, we continue to be gravely concerned about the slow rate of change in ensuring women's access to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Eleven countries in Africa do not permit abortion under any circumstances; most others allow it under extremely limited circumstances, including when there are threats to women's physical health. This means that 90% of women of childbearing age in Africa live with restrictive abortion laws.

Only four countries in Africa allow pregnancy termination without restriction as to reason, but with gestational limits. However, liberal laws on their own do not guarantee access to legal abortions. States need to ensure that enabling, rights-based environments and appropriate healthcare services are accessible to all women.

Legal barriers and hostile social conditions result in women resorting to millions of unsafe abortions, which are a key preventable contributor to the high rates of maternal mortality and morbidity on the continent.

Poverty, inequality, and systemic oppression of women, as well as inadequate access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health and rights — including modern contraceptive methods and comprehensive sexuality education — are key factors that impede women's ability to make informed decisions about their bodies.

We call on the African Commission to make real the Campaign for the Decriminalisation of Abortion in Africa by urging states to ensure that all women and girls are able to access comprehensive sexuality education as well as affordable, accessible and adequate sexual and reproductive health information and services.

We urge the commission to include the language of bodily autonomy and sexual and reproductive justice to the campaign, and to name the root causes of inequality and oppression that restrict women's ability to enjoy all their fundamental human rights.



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We call on States to adopt, ratify and implement international and regional instruments that enshrine commitments to sexual and reproductive health and rights, and in particular the Maputo Protocol and Plan of Action, and to ensure access to safe and legal abortion services nation-wide for all women, alongside access to comprehensive sexuality education and modern contraceptive methods.

Finally we call on the Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights to commission a study that explores the legal and social barriers preventing women from accessing safe abortions, and to include CSOs in her work to ensure greater state accountability for sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Thank you, Madam Chairperson.



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