



WILDAF Newsletter

« ACTING FOR WOMAN'S AND GIRL'S RIGHTS IN AFRICA »

N°93-January 2023



For 2023,
the WILDAF-AO family wishes you a
prosperous year, full of joy, happiness
and serenity for new achievements

Happy New Year **2023**



The Coordinator

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FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT US:

07 BP 7755 Lomé – Togo

Tel. : (228) 22 61-26-79

CEL(228) 92 47 90 00

EMAIL :

wildaf@cafe.tg

wildaf@wildaf-ao.org

WILDAF-AO: A network of more than 500 organizations members in 15 countries in West Africa Benin, Burkina-Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Nigeria Senegal, Togo (national networks), Sierra Leone, Mauritania, Gambia, Cape Verde (Focal Points)

WILDAF-AO

Women in Law and Development in Africa

Quarterly Newsletter

CONTENTS

Editorial	3
Gender and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security to Meet the Zero Hunger Challenge: <i>Strengthening Parliamentarians on Gender to Meet the Zero Hunger Challenge in Benin</i>	4
16 days of campaigning at WiLDAF-AO	7
2022 in pictures	10

WiLDAF- AFRIQUE DE L'OUEST Newsletter

Contributing authors for this edition:

Kafui ADJAMAGBO-JOHNSON (Coordinator)
Nicole DAGAWA (Communication assistant)

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Web site: www.wildaf-ao.org

You may obtain further information at:

Tel: (228) 22 61-26-79

Cel: (228) 92 47 90 00

Email:

wildaf_ao@yahoo.com

wildaf@wildaf-ao.org

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EDITORIAL

Focus on 2023!

WILDAF-AO team wishes you a prosperous year, full of joy, happiness, and serenity for new achievements...

What to remember from 2022?

A flash-back to 2022, indicates a plethora of crises: conflicts and their negative effects such as displaced persons, financial, economic, health, and climate crises, food insecurity, exacerbated sexual and gender-based violence, increased poverty, fuel crisis, emergency situations, thereby exposing women and girls to more violations of their rights and precariousness, resulting in a setback for gender equality.

Focusing on the negative effects of these crises, many people may not have noticed the progress that has nevertheless been made in advancing rights, equity, and justice for women and men worldwide. Despite the range of crises in 2022, which have had the greatest impact on the poorest and most marginalized populations, especially women, leading to a wave of displacement, we can celebrate some progress. These include:

- **The global trend is towards strengthened reproductive rights.**

More and more countries are passing laws that ensure and protect reproductive rights and health. According to "UNFPA, out of 153 surveyed countries (representing nearly 90% of the world's population), 76% now have laws upholding sexual and reproductive health rights.

- [a new report by the High Level Commission on ICPD25](#)

(International Conference on Population and Development) published in November 8, 2022, urged countries, activists and political leaders to combat "intersecting kinds of discrimination that obstruct justice in matters of sexuality and reproduction", to recognize and support "the leadership and power of the most excluded groups, in particular marginalized women and girls, and support the efforts led by women and their communities".

- **A step towards justice:**

There is now a growing application of legal frameworks to the world's most serious problems, to remedy historical wrongs, to draw attention to overlapping systems of oppression, and to prioritize marginalized people.

For example, the [historic agreement](#) reached at the November COP27 conference, establishes the creation of a "loss and damage" to provide the most vulnerable countries with "loss and damage" funding in recognition of their heightened exposure to climate change – a catastrophe to which they have contributed minimally. This is good news for African women and girls who suffer more than men from the impact of climate change."

-The opening on Wednesday, September 28, 2022, of the trial of [the massacre of September 28, 2009 in Guinea](#), 13 years after the events during which sexual abuse was committed against 109 women.

- **Sexual violence in times of conflict is openly condemned.**

The August 26, 2022 resolution on **International Cooperation for the Access of Survivors of Sexual Violence to Justice, Remedies and Assistance**: three leading defenders of women's health and rights - Hon. Helen Clark, Chair of the Board and former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Michelle Bachelet, United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights and former President of Chile, and H.E. José Manuel Albares, Spanish Minister of Foreign Affairs - call for urgent multilateral action to combat what they describe as a "scourge" of rape or other violent physical or mental abuse targeting vulnerable women, children, and adolescents, especially those living in humanitarian contexts. Survivors know that widespread sexual violence in times of conflict is not normal ([#ThisIsNotNormal](#)). It is high time for the world ensured its elimination.

- **Women are calling for safety in digital spaces.**

More than one in ten women have ever witnessed technology-facilitated violence such as cyberbullying or non-consensual sharing of intimate photos (so-called "revenge porn"). In 2022, many of these women and girls spoke up and said enough is enough.

EDITORIAL

[UNFPA's award-winning bodyright campaign](#) calls for better protection of women, girls, and marginalized community members from online violence. More than 30,000 people have signed [UNFPA's petition](#) calling on policymakers and technology companies to recognize digital violence when it occurs and put an end to it.

- **Mental health, a global priority.**

It is about drawing attention to the importance of mental health care and expanding access to health services. [mental health](#) seems to be in crisis all over the world. From spiking levels of [anxiety](#) and depression reported during the pandemic to post-traumatic stress for those [caught up in conflict](#) and [climate](#) emergencies, the youth and women are most affected by mental trauma, whether this be surviving [gender-based violence](#), being forced into [child marriage](#), enduring female genital mutilation, [obstetric fistula](#), [unintended pregnancies](#) or [online abuse](#), women targeted for [speaking out](#) and having a career and millions of people discriminated against because of where they were born or because they are living with a [disability](#). The whole world is witnessing a worrying increase in mental health concerns.

- **Menstruation is recognized as a human rights issue.**

Menstrual precarity is a widespread human rights issue that is often stigmatized. Huge strides have been made in the last decade in highlighting that menstruation is not only an issue of health, hygiene and dignity, but also a matter of [gender equality and human rights](#). Advocates have [changed minds about menstruation at every level](#), including at the United Nations, where the Human Rights Council adopted a resolution calling out menstruation stigma, shame and exclusion associated with periods as human rights violations. National policymakers are taking up the issue as well, with some countries [signing free period products](#) into law. Many more are addressing the unequal financial burden of menstrual hygiene products as well as highlighting the need for jobs and classrooms to accommodate women and girls.

- **The human family has reached 8 billion individuals.**

On 15 November, 2022, the world population reached its highest-ever level: 8 billion. This historic milestone reflects a world in which more women survive childbirth, more children survive infancy, and more people live longer and healthier lives.

"This is evidence of decades of progress in public health and poverty reduction, and it is the story of more resilient and effective health-care systems," said Dr. Kanem in her [remarks on the Day of 8 Billion](#).

These advancements prove that the world and Africa ended 2022 with more hope than sorrow for the rights of women and girls. In 2022, there was progress, however small.

As we are in 2023, let us celebrate the New Year with high expectations and with a strengthened commitment to human rights and the well-being of all.

In 2023, let us be more determined to continue our momentum and uphold our commitments to human rights in general, but particularly for women and girls around the world. In 2023, let us work together to ensure that women's rights are respected, their autonomy is respected, their leadership is guaranteed, their needs are met in times of crisis, and their lives are always free from violence.

In 2023, let us ensure that the gains of 2022, especially for women, do not regress but rather increase for a more equitable world for both sexes.

WiLDAF wishes you happiness, health, and success for you and your loved ones. May the year 2023 be the best ever, rich in great professional and family projects.

WiLDAF takes this opportunity to sincerely and warmly thank its partners for their loyalty and unwavering support throughout 2022. The past few years have undoubtedly been among the most difficult in the history of the network. However, thanks to you, our partners, and your trust, we are growing every day. You have allowed us to never give up and together we have overcome our difficulties. A tremendous thank!

2023 will be a crucial step in the recovery of our activities. WiLDAF-AO also salutes all the work done in 2022 by activists around the world and in Africa.

For this first issue of 2023, we offer you articles on the activities that have filled the past few months at WiLDAF, focusing on subjects such as capacity building for parliamentarians in Benin, the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence. We have also selected some images for you to look back on the network's activities in 2022.

Enjoy reading!

Gender and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security to meet the Zero Hunger Challenge

Strengthening Parliamentarians on Gender to Meet the Zero Hunger Challenge in Benin



As part of support from the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) to the Benin parliament, the parliamentary forum for capacity building and policy dialogue on gender and investments in agriculture and food security to meet the Zero Hunger challenge in Benin was held from December 13 to 16, 2022 at the BelAzur hotel in Grand Popo.

The forum was organized by Women in Law and Development in Africa - West Africa (WiLDAF-AO), in partnership with FAO and the Benin National Assembly. It falls within the framework of the ECOWAS Parliamentarians Network for Gender and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security, launched in Abuja, Nigeria, in December 2018 with the support of FAO, the International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD), OXFAM, and WiLDAF.

In Benin, despite the government's adoption of a National Gender Promotion Policy, with a multisectoral action plan aimed at achieving equality and equity between men and women by 2025 for sustainable human development, there are still persistent inequalities between men and women in limited access to productive resources such as land, improved agricultural inputs, finance, and technology, low levels of education/training, low participation in decision-making bodies, and women's lack of knowledge of their rights. These inequalities prevent Beninese women from making the necessary investments to increase their productivity.

In this context, the parliamentary forum opened on December 13, 2022. Its aim was to enhance the capacities of Beninese parliamentarians to engage in the development of legislation and policies that contribute to gender equality and the empowerment of women in the agricultural, rural, and family sectors in order to accelerate progress towards the Zero Hunger and sustainable development goals. It also aimed to facilitate the emergence of a national network of parliamentarians for gender equality, investments in agriculture, and food security in Benin. The forum brought together sixty-five (65) people from Parliament, sectoral ministries, civil society, and peasant organizations. Four speeches marked the opening ceremony of the parliamentary forum.



In his speech, Mr. **Isaias ANGUE OBAMA**, representative of FAO in Benin (on the right), reminded that the world is not on track to achieve its goal of eliminating hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition by 2030, as stated in the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) on zero hunger. According to estimates, in 2021, 828 million people suffered from hunger worldwide, representing 9.8% of the global population, with an increase of 46 million since 2020 and 150 million since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The gender gap in food insecurity also continued to widen in 2021 with 31.9% of women worldwide experiencing moderate or severe food insecurity, compared to 27.6% of men, with a gap of over 4%, up from 3 in 2020.

According to FAO representative in Benin, the forum was an opportunity to exchange experiences and see the role of parliamentarians in reducing gender inequality in the agri-food sector.

Gender and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security to meet the Zero Hunger Challenge



Mr. **Salvator Niyonzima**, Resident Coordinator of the United Nations System in Benin, echoed the FAO representative's message and reminded that climate shocks, conflicts and insecurity, economic crises (related to inflation and currency depreciation in some countries), the resurgence of the Desert Locust, COVID-19, and the war in Ukraine have wiped out the gains made over the past 15 years, placing most regions in Africa in a situation of food insecurity and malnutrition. Given this alarming picture, to meet the "Zero Hunger" challenge in Benin, bold and effective solutions must be found, notably the reduction of gender inequalities in the agri-food sector. For this, parliamentarians have their part to play and can count on the FAO and the United Nations System, he reassured. He also urged parliamentarians to seize the opportunity offered by the upcoming UN Food Systems Summit in 2023 to provide a gender-responsive response to hunger. This will be an opportunity to prioritize winning strategies in reducing gender disparities, with the support of the United Nations System, he added.



The third speaker, Mr. **Gaston DOS-SOUHOU**, Minister of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries, for his part, called for the support of parliamentarians to achieve the objectives, notably Zero Hunger.

He stressed the need for a roadmap to reduce gender inequalities in the agri-food sector.



The honorable **Nazaire SADO**, second questor of the National Assembly, the last speaker, praised the holding of the forum. According to him, despite the adoption by the Parliament of the Law No. 2022-14 on Agricultural Orientation, Food and Nutrition Security in the Republic of Benin, and the key role of women in food systems, they remain poor and more deprived in rural areas. This is because they are less prepared to cope with economic shocks, crises, and climate-related hazards. More than 928 million women do not have enough to eat, and the gender gap in food insecurity has widened. It is therefore essential to close the gender gap in agricultural and food systems to eradicate hunger, malnutrition, and poverty. He affirmed that this is a very intelligent shortcut to achieving SDG 2 on Zero Hunger.

The successive communications presented the Network of ECOWAS Parliamentarians for Gender and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security, the key concepts related to gender issues and women's empowerment in agri-food systems, reflections on the importance of gender for food security and nutrition, and the role of parliamentarians through their various functions: legislative, budgetary, control, and local governance, women's situation and gender equality in Benin and the national context: gender analysis (issues, policies, and institutional context), in-depth gender analysis of legislation and identification of strategic gender entry points, necessary alliances for the effective consideration of gender in articulation with the national gender policy, the National Plan for Agricultural Investment and Food Security (PNIASAN), and commitments related to the follow-up of the World Summit on Food Systems, integration of gender in the formulation, implementation, budgeting, and monitoring of PNIASAN, women's land rights in Benin, and the promotion of gender-sensitive value chains.

Gender and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security to meet the Zero Hunger Challenge



At the end of the workshop, the following recommendations were formulated to the National Assembly and the partners of the National Assembly.

To the National Assembly, it was requested to:

- Establish a national section of the ECOWAS Parliamentarians Network for Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security;
- Establish links with other national networks of parliamentarians for Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture.
- Appropriate legislative texts, policies, plans, and programs concerning Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security;
- Advocate with technical, financial, and scientific partners to support the network's activities;
- Continue to strengthen the capacity of members of the ECOWAS Parliamentary Network for Gender Equality and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security;
- Strengthen parliamentary oversight of government action on gender promotion in the "Zero Hunger Challenge" projects and programs in Benin.

To partners (ministries, NGOs, researchers):

- Continue capacity-building activities for various actors in the field of gender;
- Disseminate tools developed to mainstream gender in the formulation, development, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of programs, projects, and investments;

- Continue to strengthen the capacity of women, men, and all segments of the population for a better understanding of women's rights and their determining role in food security and nutrition;
- Provide greater support for women to form groups to facilitate access to resources.



The session concluded with the establishment of a national section of the **Parliamentary Network for Gender and Investments in Agriculture and Food Security** at the National Assembly of Benin. The network will interact with the government to strengthen existing legal frameworks for better access to land, to boost productivity, bridge disparities, and initiate reforms that strengthen the autonomy of women and men in the agro-food sector in Benin.



The parliamentarians also adopted a roadmap consisting of 10 actions to be taken in the future to eliminate specific gender barriers in agriculture and food security and nutrition.

Communication Service
WiLDAF-AO

16 days of campaigning at WILDAF-AO

Because women's rights are human rights, let us support equality and the dignity of every woman for a safer, more equitable, and better world for all



As every year, in 2022, WILDAF network joined the rest of the world to chant alongside numerous activists: " Unite! Activism to end violence against women and girls" which is the theme chosen by the "All United!" campaign for the 31st Edition of the [16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence](#). [Violence against women and girls remains the most widespread and extensive violation of human rights](#) in the world, affecting an estimated one in three women. This figure has remained largely unchanged over the past decade. [The latest global estimates](#) show that on average, more than five women or girls are killed every hour by a family member.

- In 2021, nearly 1 in 5 women aged 20-24 were married before turning 18.

-Less than 40% of women who survive violence seek any form of help.

-Of all women and girls intentionally killed last year, around 56% were killed by an intimate partner or another family member (45,000 out of 81,000) ([UN Women](#) and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) [report](#)).

-In West Africa, according to WHO estimates, 40% of women were victims of violence in 2018. The prevalence of child marriage is the highest in West and Central Africa, where 14% of girls aged 20 to 24 are married before the age of 15, and 41% before the age of 18 (The condition of African women. (Regional report. Economic Community of West African States: ECOWAS July 2020, coordinated by IPPFAR). According to the same report, female genital mutilation is concentrated in 27 African countries. The countries with the highest prevalence rates in West Africa are Guinea (97%), Mali, and Sierra Leone (>80%).

[The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic](#) has increased the risk factors for violence against women.

These various figures are a reminder of the extent of the phenomenon and the seriousness of the situation, accentuated by the COVID-19 pandemic and exacerbated by the confluence of crises due to climate change, global conflicts, and economic instability.

Eliminating gender-based violence is therefore imperative to prevent the heavy consequences on the victims themselves and their communities.

The 2022 theme of the " Unite! to end violence against women Campaign " invites all people to assume their role in eradicating violence against women and girls, to display their support and solidarity towards women's rights activists, and to counter the rollback of women's rights.

BECAUSE WOMEN'S RIGHTS ARE HUMAN RIGHTS, LET US SUPPORT THE EQUALITY AND DIGNITY OF EVERY WOMAN FOR A SAFER, MORE EQUAL AND BETTER WORLD FOR ALL.

Theme: **UNITE! Activism to end violence against women and girls**

- **More than 1 in 3 women experience gender-based violence during their lifetime.**
- **In 2021, nearly 1 in 5 women aged 20-24 were married before turning 18.**
- **Less than 40 per cent of women who experience violence seek help of any sort.**



It is in this context that on November 25, 2022, like activists around the world, WILDAF conducted various actions to encourage men, women, youth of both sexes, traditional and religious authorities to become activists for the prevention of violence against women and girls. These activities include raising awareness among adolescents about the phenomenon and its impacts on victims, WILDAF-AO network's demonstration of solidarity with the 109 victims of sexual violence on September 28, 2009, in Guinea, and the network's advocacy for the scaling-up of the CAJUD tool to equip legal aid centers with this tool.

16 days of campaigning at WILDAF-AO

Raising awareness among adolescents about gender-based violence and its impact on victims



On November 29, 2022, WILDAF-AO launched the campaign activities by sensitizing students of Ecole Ville 1 in Tsévié about gender-based violence, the importance of adolescents' sexual and reproductive rights, sexual education for the youth to prevent unintended pregnancy, the use of the CAJUD tool to enable victims of violence to access legal assistance, as well as the use of the Protocol for the holistic care of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and victims of early pregnancy developed by WILDAF and its partners.

The event was attended by civil society partners including WILDAF-Togo, the Women, Democracy and Development Reflection and Action Group (GF2D), the Togolese Association for Family Welfare (ATBEF), the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP-Togo), the NGO FAMME, COLOMBE, ALAFIA, Girls Motion, Filles Debout, the National Volunteering Agency in Togo (ANVT) ... and 98 students and teachers who showed interest in the issue.

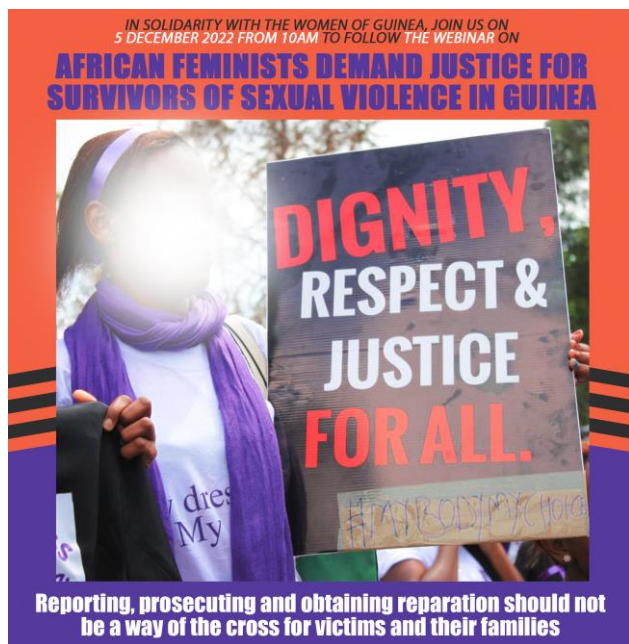


At the end of the session, teachers urged organizers to have more activities of this kind to get students and even teachers interested in the issue of violence against women and its consequences for young girls.

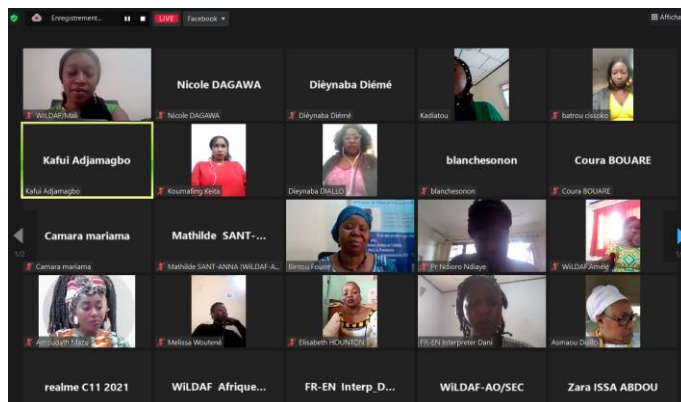
Des images de la rencontre



Solidarity with women in Guinea, African feminists demand justice for survivors of sexual violence in Guinea: **"Impunity will not prevail"**



AFRICAN WOMEN IN SOLIDARITY WITH RAPE SURVIVORS IN GUINEA DEMAND AN END TO IMPUNITY



We, the participants of the webinar organised by WILDAF-AO on December 5, 2022, on the theme « "SOLIDARITY WITH THE WOMEN OF GUINEA: AFRICAN FEMINISTS DEMAND JUSTICE FOR SURVIVORS OF SEXUAL VIOLENCE IN GUINEA » ;

After listening to the interventions of the Chair of the Association of Victims and Relatives of Victims of the Events of September 28, 2009 in Guinea, Mrs Diallo Asmaou and lawyer Halimatou Camara on:

- The context of the atrocities against Guinean citizens on September 28, 2009 and the subsequent sexual violence against 109 women who were raped;
- The ongoing trial and its challenges, including the difficulties related to the recognition of the perpetrators of this mass crime, the evidence of the violence suffered by the women, in particular the difficulties in meeting the requirement for the production of medical certificates by the victims;
- The systemic impunity that characterises Guinea and most countries in the sub-region;

Welcoming the presence of Mrs **Janet Sallah Njie**, member of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, who, in her speech, expressed her solidarity with the survivors of the rapes committed in Guinea in September 2009;

Reassured by the Special Rapporteur's commitment to fight sexual violence in times of conflict, which is only an irruption of the prevailing violence against women and girls in normal times,

On December 16, 2023, in solidarity with women in Guinea, African feminists demanded justice for survivors of sexual violence from the September 28, 2009 massacre in Guinea, during a virtual meeting organized by WILDAF-AO. On September 28, 2022, the trial of the atrocities committed in Guinea during the events of September 28, 2009 began. During this event, 109 women participating in demonstrations against the ruling power were raped by the military.

The 16 days of the campaign-taking place in the particular context of this trial, WILDAF-AO took the opportunity of the campaign to organize a webinar as part of its regional advocacy. The network invited women, actors, and targets concerned with justice and women's rights to express their disapproval of these abhorrent acts of sexual violence used as weapons in times of conflict, and to demand that justice be effectively rendered to survivors through the trial. For participants, it is time to prevent future cases of violence and governments must act and be accountable for these acts of violence that destroy societies.

To this end, a statement by women titled "African Feminists, in solidarity with rape survivors in Guinea demand an end to impunity" was circulated on social media. Here is the content:

to work towards accountability the of States, the domestication and application of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa;

1. Congratulate the survivors of sexual violence in Guinea for their courage and their struggle within **AVIPA (Association des Victimes Parents et Amis)** to obtain reparation;
2. We welcome the fact that, thanks to their actions, the violence they experienced, has been the subject of the ongoing trial in Guinea since September 28, 2009, and demand an end to impunity of violence in this country, throughout West Africa and all the continent;
3. Express our solidarity with the survivors and all Guinean women who support their struggle;
4. We pledge to show this solidarity by actively participating in a digital campaign to raise global awareness of the situation of survivors, the need for justice, and to monitor the Guinean women's rape case until justice is done;
5. Encourage the Guinean political authorities, who are accountable for the human rights of their citizens, to ensure that following the trial, a programme of reparation and support for the survivors is set up and implemented in reponse to the wishes of the members of AVIPA and the women survivor in particular.

Having been informed during the same webinar of the acts of violence against Amy Ndiaye, a Senegalese parliamentarian, perpetrated by two males parliamentarian in the middle of a session of the National Assembly, we express our indignation at such an act, which illustrates the practice of violence against women in politics, and we demand that measures be taken to avoid impunity.

The participants

Published on December 07, 2022

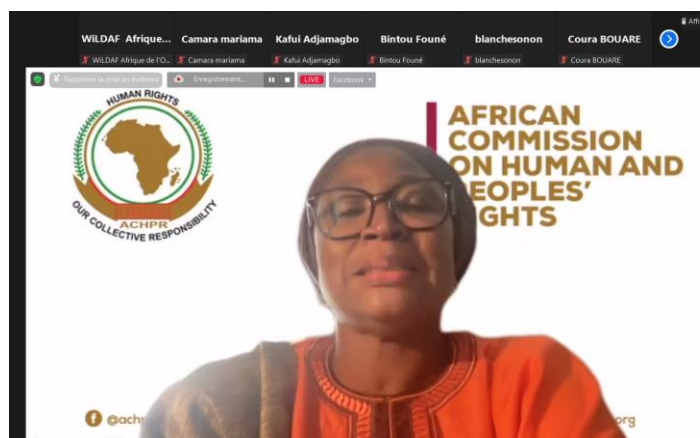
In addition to the statement by African feminists, Ms **Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie**, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa and guest of honour at the meeting, sent a message of solidarity to the women of Guinea, in particular to the survivors of sexual violence committed during the stadium massacre in September 2009: **"We must send a strong message that impunity will not prevail,"** she said.

We share her message of solidarity with our readers.

Solidarity Statement

By:

Hon. Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah- Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights



May I express gratitude to the Women in Law and Development in Africa- Afrique de l'Ouest (WILDAF-AO) for organising this event and extending an invitation to the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, through the Mechanism of the Special Rapporteur of the Rights of Women in Africa, to convey a solidarity message to the women of Guinea, especially the survivors of Sexual Violence against women during the notorious stadium massacre in September 2009, when 109 women participating in demonstrations against the government were raped by the military and security forces in Guinea. This Solidarity forum is indeed timely, as is taking place within the context of the 16 days of Activism Against Gender Based Violence. Whilst commending the convening, we must also note, with a heavy heart, that the trial of the perpetrators only commenced on the 28th of September 2022, more than 13years after the heinous and vicious acts were committed.

As we take note of this unduly long interregnum, Amnesty International in their Report on the situation in Guinea have confirmed that **"victims of sexual violence in Guinea face social stigmatisation, a lack of accessible medical care and serious barriers to justice"** The Report therefore demand that, **"shame must change sides, ensuring rights and justice for victims of sexual violence in Guinea."**

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (The Maputo Protocol), which the Mechanism of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa is entrusted with, requires State parties to take steps to ensure that women are protected from sexual violence and its consequences.

The African Commission has also raised concern over sexual violence being used as a weapon of war through several initiatives including the development of Resolutions with the latest being Resolution ACHPR/Res. 492(LXIX) 2021 on Violence Against Women during Armed Conflicts in Africa. This Resolution amongst other things, mandates State parties to ratify and domesticate the Maputo Protocol and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women and its Optional Protocol; as well as ensure its effective implementation and monitoring at the national level.

Additionally, the African Commission has in the past conducted a study to measure the impact of armed conflicts on the rights of Women and Children in Africa. This study reinforced that to prevent sexual violence in conflicts, **we must send a strong message that impunity will not prevail.** At the same time, we must continue to campaign during peace time to contest and confront harmful cultures and traditions and to educate boys and men and also women who tend to be custodians of some of these harmful cultures. Without men saying no, we will not end the circle of sexual violence. We need men to commit to fight with us to commit to not look the other way, when atrocities are being committed and to commit to educate boys and other men.

As the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, I feel obliged to stand here today to deliver this solidarity message because of the commitment of the Commission in working towards ending all forms of Sexual Violence against women, especially those that occur in times of conflict. Also, because the Commission remains deeply concerned that multiple forms of human rights violations continue to take place in the context of crisis and conflict, in particular rape, sexual slavery, sexual mutilation of women, amongst others. Perpetrators are hardly held accountable for their actions. Instead, survivors carry the burden of stigma and trauma throughout their lives, and often doubly brutalised by harmful social norms and victim-blaming.

On this day, in my capacity as the SRRWA, I stand in solidarity with survivors and commit to supporting the most vulnerable i.e women and girls as they struggle to live in dignity and peace in the midst of conflicts. This includes increasing support for victims and displaced women and girls who are vulnerable to sexual exploitation, and those from marginalised, remote and rural areas where justice and protection systems are weak.

I stand in full solidarity with our Guinean sisters, and call and demand for full justice for all the victims and survivors of GBV during the Crisis in Gunea!

To stand in solidarity with these survivor means;

- Bolstering national justice systems and Rule of Law capacities so that perpetrators are held accountable for their crimes and victims receive timely and psychological support;
- Upholding the rights of survivors, and treating them with respect and understanding, while giving them the opportunity to mend their fragmented communities.
- Supporting women led Civil Society Organisations like WiLDAF-AO that work to break down the social, economic and cultural barriers that deny women and girls their rights to protection, equality and justice;
- Addressing the underlying causes of sexual violence in conflict- from inequalities to institutional weaknesses and militarisation, and strengthening early warning systems to prevent these crimes from happening in the first place.

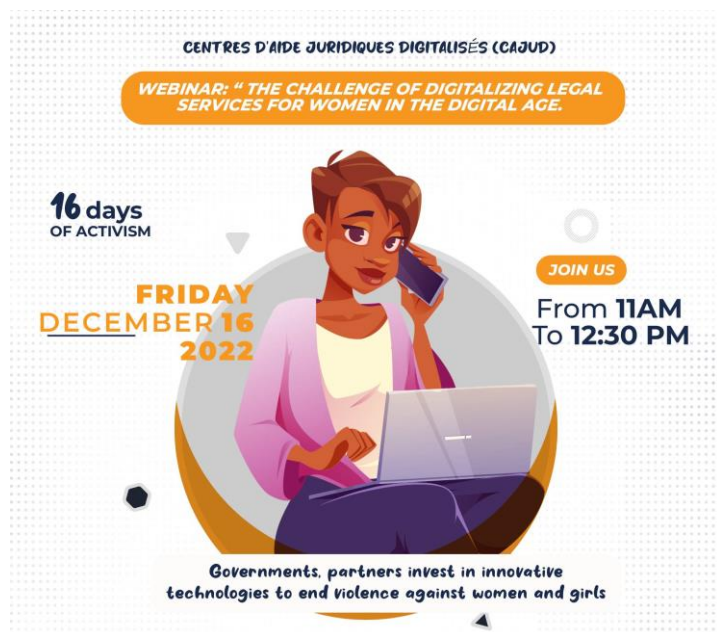
I am convinced that with increased political resolve, we can match words with action and end the scourge of sexual violence in conflict, once and for all. The mechanism of the SRRWA and I personally commit to work with all of you here to end sexual violence during conflict. Let's all commit to end this brutality and let today be the beginning of the end of sexual violence during conflict.

Janet Ramatoulie Sallah-Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

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The challenge of digitalizing legal services for women in the digital age

Many women were forced to confine themselves at home with their abuser. The services that are supposed to provide them with help, have been disrupted or inaccessible.



The year 2020 marked the twenty-fifth anniversary of the [Fourth World Conference on Women](#) and the adoption of the [Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action](#) (1995), and the five-year milestone of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals of the [2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development](#).

For gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls worldwide, 2020 offered new opportunities to come together, renew commitments, rekindle political will and mobilize the public around the issue of gender equality. 2020 was therefore a significant year for the accelerated achievement of equality between men and women and the empowerment of women and girls worldwide. Instead, the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic has almost nullified the limited progress made over the past few decades. The pandemic has accentuated pre-existing inequalities, exposing the vulnerabilities of social, political and economic systems, which in turn have amplified the effects of the pandemic.

In all spheres, whether it is health, the economy, security or social protection, the devastation caused by COVID-19 has been more severe for women and girls, simply because of their gender. Gender-based violence has experienced an exponential increase due to the economic and social pressures generated by the pandemic and in the context of movement restrictions and social isolation measures.



In response to the prevailing situation, Women in Law and Development in Africa-West Africa (WiLDAF-AO) initiated the project **"Placing Equality and Women's Rights at the Heart of COVID-19 Public Policy"** funded by Crossroads International and AWDF to contribute to reducing the risks of women's rights violations related to the corona virus situation in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana and Togo.

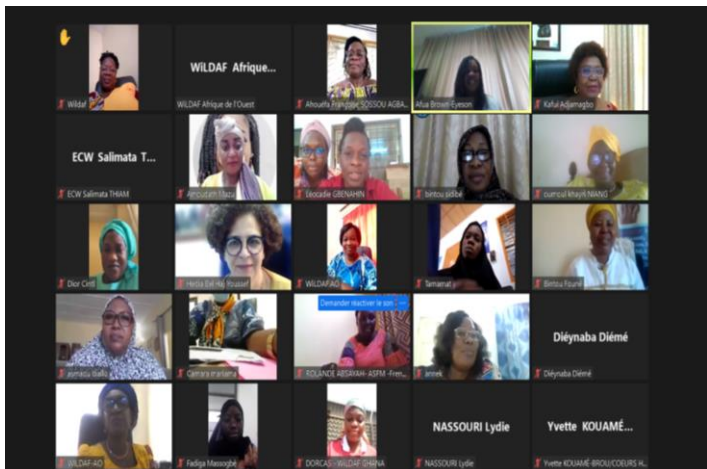
The studies carried out in the implementation of the project in the aforementioned 4 countries confirmed the harmful effects of the health crisis on women and girls in various fields.

Given the difficulties and especially with regards to the upsurge of violence against women and girls, a period when it was difficult to reach the legal aid centers, WiLDAF-AO deemed it necessary to take the initiative of digitalized legal service for women. A software called CAJUD has been developed.

CAJUD is a digital platform set up in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and Togo. Launched on Friday July 30, 2021 on International African Women's Day, CAJUD initiative is a web application that aims to improve access to information services for women and girls, legal advice and assistance by offering them the possibility of seizing Legal Aid Centres or listening centres from their place of residence or any place. It aims to provide women and girls with an answer to the need for access to a legal service without necessarily moving.



It has the advantage of creating a new digital channel of communication between complainants and legal aid centres that allows them to quickly assist complainants, does not require them to move and federates the data collected by other channels, especially in person. It is accessible even to complainants who can only speak the local language or who do not have digital skills, since a WhatsApp call as well as an online service call are possible.



The 2022 edition of the 16 Days Campaign against Gender-Based Violence was an opportunity for the network to inform, to raise awareness and advocate for the scaling up of the tool among actors with scaling capacity, namely States and development actors

For the event, two distinguished guests, intervened to support the advocacy. In particular the Special Rapporteur on Women's Rights in Africa and The ECOWAS Centre for Gender Development (ECGD)

Statement By

Hon. Commissioner Janet Ramatoulie Sallah- Njie,
Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa,
African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights



Distinguished ladies and gentlemen, it is my honour to deliver this statement for this very important webinar on the Digitalisation of Legal Aid Centers, in my capacity as the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa. I first of all wish to congratulate WILDAF-AO for initiating the process of digitalisation of Legal Aid Centers in Benin, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal and Togo.

It is anticipated that the digitalisation of Legal Aid Centers in these countries will give women and girls the possibility to seize the digitalised Legal Aid Centers from their places of residence or from any other place by telephone, or other online means and to be assisted or receive advice for the settlement of their legal problems. I also wish to thank participants, especially women's rights and human rights organisations present here today to contribute to the debate on scaling up the digitalisation of Legal Aid Centers.

In 2021, an estimated 243 million women and girls aged 15-49 years globally were subjected to sexual or physical violence by an intimate partner. A portion of these women form part of the 2.5 billion women who are deprived of various forms of legal protections.¹ The African Union remains adamant on the attainment of legal representation for any party involved in a case. It has also acknowledged that "realisation of women's rights is hampered by high cost of legal fees and the free legal aid to women is rare, provided mainly by Civil Society Organisation."

The African has remained adamant in its quest to ensure that all persons in African have access to ICT infrastructure and internet as a basic right. To this end, the African Union Agenda 2063 was adopted to serve as a blueprint and master plan for transforming Africa into a global house and places emphasis on availability of adequate ICT infrastructures and internet to African as a right.

As an organ of the African Union, the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights adopted Resolution 41 on the Right to Fair Trial and Legal Aid in Africa.¹ This Resolution recognised the importance of Legal Aid and the need to strengthen the importance of this right on the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights. To strengthen its efforts in the attainment of Legal Aid, the Commission adopted the Principles and Guidelines on the Right to a Fair Trial and Legal Assistance in Africa to provide guidance on setting up an effective Legal Aid system even where resources are limited. Resolution 522 on the Protection of Women Against Digital Violence in Africa which amongst other things calls on States parties to facilitate women's access to education in digital technology domains in order to remove the digital gender gaps, and ensure gender diversity in the tech sector, was also adopted by the African Commission.

The Mechanism of the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa has always had a long-standing interest in the issue of Legal Aid in Africa because for many women, access to Legal Aid is not a reality. Women face a number of challenges in accessing justice. Eligibility criteria for Legal Aid schemes may discriminate against women if it means test are based on family or household income, which they may not have access to.

These challenges have been heightened by the COVID-19 pandemic which created a global emergency of multiple dimensions and renders the ability of women to access justice even more important. Thus, to eliminate all forms of violence against women means legal services including the provision of effective Legal Aid Services must be effectively implemented. Digitalising such services is a step further to ensuring that women's rights as envisage in the African Charter, and the Maputo Protocol are fully realised. However, for such services to be digitalised, it is important to note that inclusiveness and human rights-based approach should be at the heart of any digital solution in the sphere of Legal Aid. Moreover, the appropriateness of innovative technologies largely depends on the reason for which Legal Aid is required.

With an estimated 546 million women around the world not having access to mobile phone or other forms of online devices/platforms, digitalising such services could potentially exclude these women from attaining justice and or other forms of legal services. Thus, it is important that the propose digitalisation framework draws from critical lessons from other countries that have successfully implemented it, which includes the important need to undertake judicial administration more efficiently through increased digitisation, while at the same time ensuring that women can fully benefit from appropriate technology services. This could begin with the basic commitment to ensure that every woman has access to a mobile phone as a means of communication and receiving information.

In conclusion, the potential of digitalisation lies largely in its capacity to exploit the interactive capacities of the internet. Advocacy efforts on the digitalisation process must consider and include reforms on the legal aid apparatus, buy in on new technologies from all stakeholders: legal services authorities, lawyers, judges, and litigants, who are the critical constituency. More importantly, it must address litigants' potential lack of trust in technology due to unfamiliarity, privacy concerns, and fear of misuse. Until these realities are considered, the aim to improve adequate legal services will remain unrealised.

Thank you all for your kind attention.

Janet Ramatoulie Sallah- Njie, Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa, African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights

- **Intervention by Mrs Thiam Salimata Program Manager at the ECOWAS Centre for Gender Development (ECGD)**

The Program Officer at the ECOWAS Centre for Gender noted during her intervention that in West Africa, The COVID-19 health crisis has impacted all areas of life exposing women and girls to increased vulnerability and GBV growth.

According to the Program Officer at the ECOWAS Centre for Gender, although some ECOWAS Member States have promulgated texts on the treatment of victims of violence through, access to justice, the green lines for gender observatories, the human rights observatory, guides for police on gender-based violence, the creation of a single window for gender-based violence,... the challenges remain enormous.

16 days of campaigning at WILDAF-AO

These challenges require us to respond appropriately through legislation, but above all, to raise awareness about violent behaviour. The projects are huge and require efforts by all actors for zero tolerance of gender-based violence. That is why ECOWAS welcomes the WILDAF initiative to set up this digital platform in five (5) ECOWAS member countries.

She said that CAJUD initiative is relevant for ECOWAS, it is essential to maintain the momentum around this initiative in order to develop an echo system of opportunity and line of action to accelerate the fight against GBV in the West African region; This is the whole point of this plea for the scaling up of the CAJUD at the level of ECOWAS.

We are prepared to initiate consultations with WILDAF and other partners to define the possible and achievable levers of collaboration in the short and medium term to support the scaling up of CAJUD in the 15 Members States, she said.

According to her, collaboration could be made around the implementation of new policies and strategies adopted by ECOWAS in **“ECOWAS regional strategy for the prevention of and response to gender-based violence” and that of sexual harassment in the workplace and in educational establishments**. These two political documents adopted by the ECOWAS Heads of State and Government in 2021 will be translated into concrete action to ensure the necessary social transformations and significantly reduce GBV in the sub-region.

She concluded by congratulating WILDAF for the initiative on behalf of the Director of the ECOWAS Gender Centre and thanked all the actors working around this platform to push for gender equality in the region.

Communication Service
WILDAF-AO

2022 in pictures

Through a selection of images, WILDAF-AO recounts its fight for the rights of women and girls and their empowerment in 2022



Community advocacy session in Lavie (Togo) in June 2022



Mrs. Lois Addoh from WILDAF-Ghana, representing WILDAF-AO at the International Day of Rural Women in Maputo (Mozambique) October 15, 2022

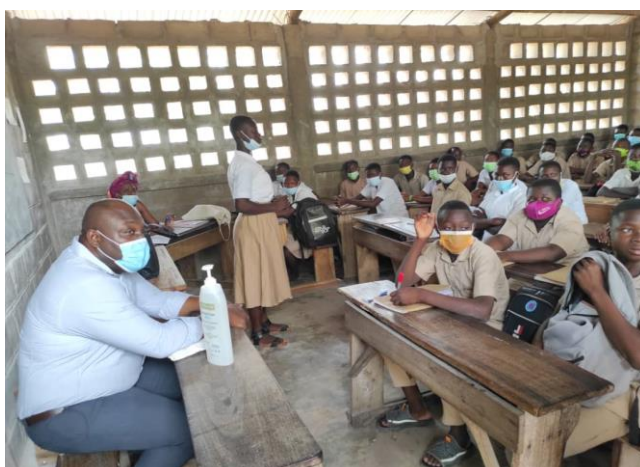


Working session with representatives of Crossroads International at WILDAF-AO headquarters on June 2, 2022

2022 in pictures



Launch in Lomé of the Protocol for the holistic care of survivors of sexual and gender-based violence and victims of early pregnancy on September 29, 2022



Awareness-raising session for pupils in Akparé (Togo) on the phenomenon of early pregnancy



Launch of the 30% for Elle campaign at the 4th GIMAC-RECs meeting on 11-12 July 2022 in Lusaka, Zambia



WILDAF representative Mrs. Amoudath Mazu participating in the 1st CSW Africa session from 14th to 17th March 2022, in Nairobi (Kenya)



WILDAF and its partners are building the capacity of young leaders in Chad in January 2022 as part of the Sahel à Égalité project