

11TH JULY, 2023


**THE 3RD AFRICA
GIRLS AND
WOMEN'S FESTIVAL**



**#SHELEADS
WOMEN
MYSELF**



#SHELEADS

Ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed, I'm honored to join you all today in this auspicious moment as we commemorate the 20th Anniversary of the adoption of the Maputo Protocol.

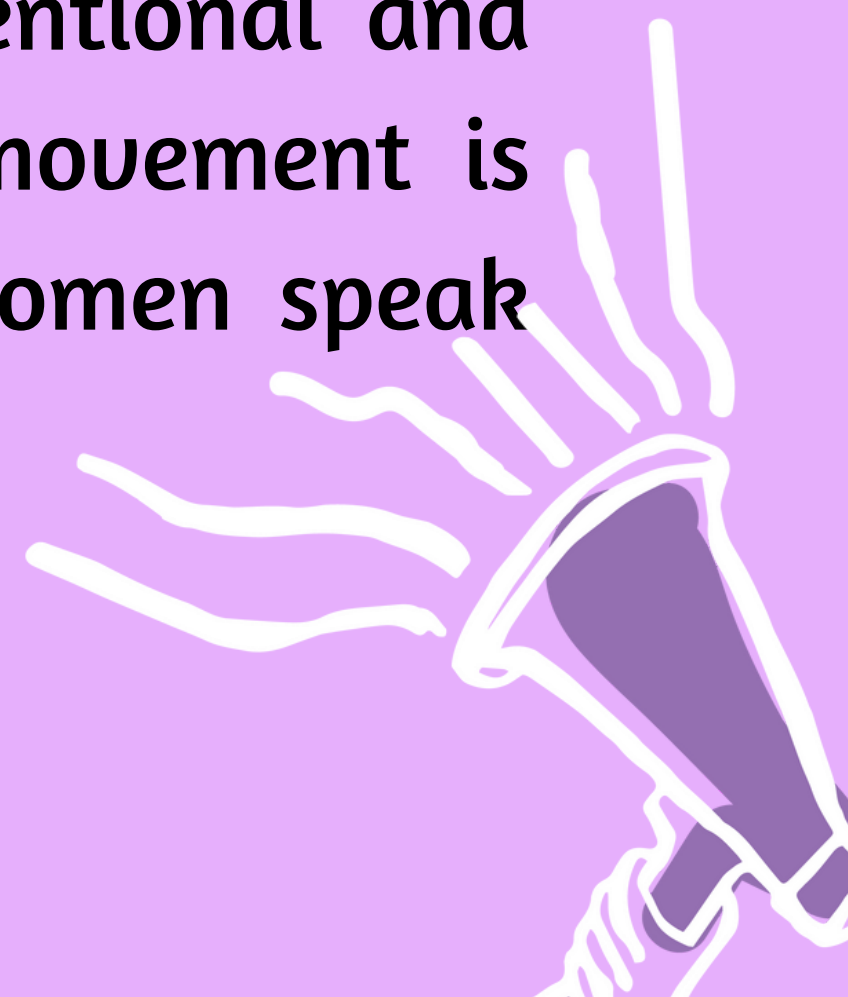
I'm here representing 60+ girls and young women between the ages of 14 years and 25 years who are gathering together for the 3rd African Girls and Young Women Festival, for three days, yesterday, today and tomorrow.

Ladies and gentlemen, it is a fact that Africa has the youngest population in the world. The median age on the African continent is just 19 with majority of the young people between the age of 18-24 years old.

Allow me to pause here and ask, by show of hands, how many in this room are 19 years old and younger or were born in the 2000's?

Ladies and gentlemen, that's a reality check – those of us who were not even born by the time the Maputo Protocol was adopted in 2003, we are the ones who are taking the mantle and ready to push for the universal ratification, domestication, implementation and financing of the Maputo Protocol.

We are grateful to FEMNET and other feminists and women's rights organizations on whose shoulders we continue to stand – those who have been intentional and consistent in ensuring the African women's movement is intergenerational and that girls and young women speak for themselves!



Yesterday, as we commenced our festival, we have 4 critical demands that we are presenting to you on this day:-

Number one, we recognize that the Maputo Protocol though progressive in many fronts, is not inclusive in language and representation. African women and girls are not a homogenous group – they exist and experience life in diverse intersecting realities including those with disabilities, adolescent girls, young women, those in the popular economy, those identifying as gender diverse persons, and more. We would like to see ourselves and our intersecting realities represented and included in the Maputo Protocol. We are therefore calling on AU members states to submit to the Chairperson of the AU Commission proposals for the amendment and revision of the Protocol, as outlined in article 30 of the Protocol. This will not only allow for a deeper reflection and analysis on what has worked but also what should be included using a human rights approach.

Number two, the Maputo Protocol has provisions articulating the prevention and protection of violence against women and girls. However, a missing link is addressing technology-facilitated gender based violence or cyber violence, which has been on the rise especially since the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic, when many aspects of our lives moved online, to be able to work, study or make our voices heard. Unfortunately, a recent report by Plan International shows that 58% of girls and young women between the ages of 15 – 25 years stopped or reduced using digital platforms because of the rising online violence that is meted on women, girls and gender diverse persons.



Women experience more severe forms of cyber harassment, which often includes death threats, sexual harassment in forms like body-shaming, unwanted sexual advances, unsolicited sexual images, rape threats and cyberstalking. In many cases these forms of harassment are conducted by people they know, such as ex-domestic partners, hence increasing their safety concerns. This is totally unacceptable - more than half of the population is not reaping the benefits of the digital transformation. We are therefore demanding that African States enact and monitor implementation of comprehensive laws against all forms of technology-facilitated gender based violence.

Number three, we are angered every time we watch or read in the news how our leaders are not honoring and implementing existing laws that are meant to safeguard and protect our rights as girls and young women. For instance, why would any country allow for the age limit of marriage to be below 18 years? Or why would FGM and child marriage still persist in any of our countries which have enacted laws on anti-FGM and anti-child marriage? Or why would a country ignore legal provisions of at least 30% or 50% representation of women and girls in all decision-making spaces? These and many more inconsistencies and disregard of the legal provisions must end. We demand full implementation of existing laws, including the Maputo Protocol, without any excuse and without any delay.



For starters we are calling on all the countries that have ratified the Maputo Protocol with reservations to lift the reservations because women's rights are human rights, period! All States must submit their reports on the Maputo Protocol to the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, girls and young women are demanding to be included in all advocacy and decision-making spaces at national, regional and global levels from beginning and not to be tokenized. Young women must be present in political decision-making spaces. Currently in Kenya, representation of women in parliament stands at 24% with young women representing a paltry 1%. These numbers are not too off in many other African countries. We are demanding meaningful investment and long-term resourcing of local and community young women-led organizations to conduct individual and community broad-based social norm change to shift the patriarchal mindsets of the electorate. Equally financing of the commitments made by countries in fulfilling their mandates within the Maputo protocol.

