



AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY UNION

APU

40th Conference
71st Session of the Executive Committee
(Ouagadougou, 6 - 10 November 2017)

Report of the APU Committee of women parliamentarians

The Chair of the Conference called on Madam AHLAM Mohamed IBRAHIM, member of the Sudan National Assembly, to submit the Report of the APU Committee of women parliamentarians.

Madam AHLAM Mohamed IBRAHIM, Rapporteur of the APU Committee of women parliamentarians , read out the following report :

Report of the Committee of Women Parliamentarians of the African Parliamentary Union

On the occasion of the 40th Conference of the African Parliamentary Union, the Committee of Women Parliamentarians met on 8 November 2017 at the Ouaga 2000 Conference Centre in Ouagadougou. In the chair was Honourable Mervat Michel Nassif, Member of Parliament of the People's Assembly of Egypt, representing honourable Aminata Diallo, MP of the National Assembly of Senegal, and Chairperson of the Committee of Women Parliamentarians, who could not attend.

With her on the high table were Hon. Ahlam Mohamed Ibrahim, MP of the National Assembly of Sudan and Rapporteur of the Committee of Women Parliamentarians of APU, and Mr. Koffi N'Zi, Secretary-General of APU.

The following member parliaments took part in the meeting: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Comores, Côte-d'Ivoire, Djibouti, Ghana, Mali, Morocco, Niger, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

In her capacity as member of parliament of the host country, the MP from Burkina Faso, on behalf of her national group, welcomed the women parliamentarians and wished them a pleasant stay in the the country.

In her opening statement, the Deputy Chairperson of the Committee of Women Parliamentarians, on behalf of the Chairperson of the Committee, and on her own behalf, thanked the authorities and the Burkinabe people for all the attention and care shown to participants at the meeting.

Tackling the theme on the agenda, "**Promoting girls' enrolment as an effective way to combat early marriage in Africa**", she gave an overview of the African context, which was fraught with early marriages among millions of children, especially girls.

She called for the introduction of informed policies, the adoption of a holistic approach and long-term commitment by all stakeholders. Lastly, she declared the meeting of the Committee of Women Parliamentarians of APU open.

Prior to adopting the agenda, the Secretary-General of APU, in his words of encouragement, promised frank collaboration with the Committee of Women Parliamentarians and expressed his readiness to assist them in implementing the activities of the Committee.

The draft agenda was as follows:

1. Adoption of the agenda
2. Promoting girls' enrolment as an effective way to combat early marriage in Africa.
3. 2016 Activity report
4. 2018 Activity programme
5. Any other business

The Committee then considered the items on the agenda.

Item 1: Promoting girls' enrolment as an effective way to combat early marriage in Africa

Following a lively and fruitful debate on the theme, the Committee formulated the following resolution:

Draft resolution

"Promoting girls' enrolment as an effective way to combat early marriage in Africa"

Explanatory statement

Early marriage still persists in African countries, where the majority of the population is rural. Given its prevalence in recent times, early marriage has become a concern to African States and their partners, particularly those active in the area of children's rights. This phenomenon is an impediment to girls' enrolment because it robs them of the right to education - one of the rights recognised by national and international instruments.

Child marriage is a violation of fundamental human rights and an obstacle to achieving almost all the Millennium Development Goals. According to the United Nations Population Fund, over 140 million girls, 50 million of whom are under 15, will be married between 2011 and 2020, if this present trend continues. This translates into 39,000 girls married every day, the majority in South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Indeed, the right of girls to not marry before the age of majority and without their consent is one of the most violated rights in the world. Adolescent brides – the 14.2 million girls married off every year – have a higher risk of experiencing early pregnancies and domestic

violence, and are more likely to remain poor, particularly because their education is disrupted.

This is a widespread and serious phenomenon, yet, it was not until the beginning of the 21st century that the first international studies on child marriage took place. These studies recognized child marriage as a violation of children's rights and a major obstacle to development.

Even though marriage, as an institution, is also a right to be enjoyed by all persons who desire it, it must be governed by rules. Its enjoyment must not lead to the violation of other fundamental human rights of the girl child: the right to health, growth, education, well-being, decent life and even survival and development.

Indeed, the needs and rights of girls have not been adequately taken into account in the Millennium Development Goals. In implementing the Sustainable Development Goals, it is important to give prominence to girls' rights, especially the fight against child marriage.

The Committee of Women Parliamentarians, meeting in Ouagadougou, Burkina Faso,

Considering that in some countries where the majority of the population is rural, early marriage is still rife,

Considering that child marriage is a violation of human rights and one of the main impediments to development,

Considering that this phenomenon is detrimental to girls' enrolment and denies them the right to education, as well as to the relevant Sustainable Development Goals,

Recognizing that the right of girls to education is a right recognized by national and international instruments,

Noting that national laws in some African countries still discriminate against girls,

Underscoring the right of children to participate in decisions that affect them,

Drawing on international instruments relating to human rights and early marriage

Considering that early marriage has numerous harmful consequences and only perpetuates the cycle of poverty,

Noting that an international legislative framework remains inadequate and/or is inadequately implemented,

Aware of the prevalence of early marriage in Africa,

Recommends:

1. Combating early marriage in Africa by:
 - Providing access to quality education;
 - Improving access to quality primary and secondary education, in a conducive and safe environment for both girls and boys;

- Developing and implementing effective legislation to fight the scourge of early marriage, by:
 - Limiting the marriage age for both boys and girls, and applying sanctions;
 - Challenging social and cultural norms by actively mobilizing girls, boys, parents and political leaders to change practices that discriminate against girls and creating social, economic and civic opportunities for girls and young women.
 - Providing girls who are already married with options for enrolment and/or vocational training and access to health information and services (including HIV prevention), and protection against domestic violence.
2. The involvement of the African people themselves, the main stakeholders in this phenomenon, through a community mechanism designed to prevent and combat early marriage and promote girls' education;
 3. The implementation of a participatory approach by African countries and their United Nations partners, by:
 - Training parents on child rights issues, including education;
 - Helping parents to understand that the rights of children are interdependent, and that, as parents, they need to know that early marriage is detrimental to education; and that allowing their girl child to marry at a later age gives her the opportunity to continue her education and be a responsible mother to her children.
 4. Taking into account international instruments relating to human rights, including:
 - The Universal Declaration on Human Rights (1948)
 - The United Nations Convention on Consent to Marriage, the Minimum age for marriage (1964)
 - The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966)
 - The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979)
 - The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (1981)
 - The Bamako Declaration for the protection of children (2001)
 - The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights (2003)
 5. Including in the school curriculum, courses on the dangers of adolescent marriages;

6. Ensuring the economic empowerment of families so that poverty does not become a cause for dropping out of school;
7. Adopting legislation by African parliaments to combat early marriage.

Item 2: 2016 activity report

The Committee was not able to consider this item as no activity was carried out in 2016.

Item 3: 2018 Activity programme

Following a fruitful debate, the activity programme for 2018 was adopted as follows:

1. Joint activity with UN-Women and the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) on issues such as unemployment, immigration, quota of women's participation in parliaments;
2. Creation of a Facebook page or other platform to enable APU women parliamentarians to stay in touch and exchange views on issues of common interest;
3. For the implementation of the recommendation on early marriage, organize a parliamentary day of awareness in each country.

Item 4: Any other business

At the end of their deliberations, the Committee of African Women Parliamentarians were pleased with the active and rich debate on the theme and other items on the agenda.

The Committee, in quoting the provisions of the Statutes, Part III: Organs of the Union, Section 1: The Conference of Presiding Officers, Article 8, paragraph 7, which stipulates that: "This Committee shall meet on the eve of each Conference", recommended that that article should be amended.

She warmly thanked their male counterparts and inter-parliamentary organizations which supported the Committee of Women Parliamentarians by participating in their meetings. She also thanked the Secretary-General of APU, who promised that the Secretariat would provide its support to the activities of the Committee.

She also commended the Secretariat for its technical support, all which these contributed to the smooth running of the meeting.

Done in Ouagadougou, 8 November 2017