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African Union: An opportunity to strengthen the promotion and protection of the women's rights

Amnesty International urges the African Union ministerial meeting, convening in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 24 to 28 March, to agree on a protocol to strengthen the human rights framework for the protection and promotion of women's rights in Africa.

"It is vital that the Draft Protocol includes measures to ensure greater accountability of states to eliminate prejudices and practices that impede women's rights to equality and freedom from discrimination. The meeting must send an important message to African governments that the human rights of women are an inalienable, integral, and indivisible part of internationally recognized human rights," Amnesty International said.

The Draft Protocol is expected to be adopted by the Assembly of Heads of the African Union at its second session in Maputo in July.

Numerous violations of women's rights, including female genital mutilation, forced marriage, domestic violence and rape, occur on a daily basis in Africa. These abuses result from, and are compounded by, women's social and economic inequality: lack of access to education, land, financial resources and health care and their inequality within the family.

Amnesty International appeals to the government participants to agree on comprehensive standards that would not only guarantee women's right to live free from violence, but also provide more effective implementation and enforcement mechanisms.

"Since many abuses of women's rights, especially gender violence, result from private action, participants should seek the inclusion of explicit provisions on the question of state responsibility for violations of women's rights by private groups and individuals, in the Draft Protocol," Amnesty International urged.

"Any consideration of possible human rights standards to strengthen the Draft Protocol must necessarily take into account the needs and opinions of African women, and draw on their insights and experiences about what is central to their integrity as human beings."

Background

Negotiations around the Draft Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa began in 1995. The last meeting of governments experts to negotiate the Draft Protocol took place in November 2001 in Addis Ababa.

Once the text of the Draft Protocol is agreed by the government experts, it will be passed to the African Union Assembly for its adoption in July 2003.

This Draft Protocol contains provisions to promote and protect a wide range of human rights of women in Africa, including the right to life, integrity and security of person, protection from harmful traditional practices, and protection of women in armed conflict.

The current draft mandates the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to monitor states' implementation of the provisions of the Protocol.

Public Document

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