

Delegation from the Republic of Kenya

Position Paper for UN-Women

The topics before the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) are: Eliminating Child, Early and Forced Marriage by 2030; and Supporting the Involvement of Women in Governance and Decision-Making. The Republic of Kenya is deeply committed to work for UN-Women's universal directives to achieve gender equality, women's empowerment, and the upholding of women's rights. Thus, we advocate international collaboration to intensify the efforts of implying gender equality, as it is a fundamental human right.

I. Eliminating Child, Early and Forced Marriage by 2030

Child, early and forced marriage (CEMF) is an issue, which is more rampant than many might expect. There are over 700 million women worldwide, which have been married off as children, experiencing dowry-related violence, sexual abuse and harmful traditional practices like genital mutilation and cutting. Furthermore, they often have to suffer from sexual transmitted diseases like AIDS. In Sub-Saharan Africa there are approx. 38% of girls married by the age of 18 years, and in some regions over 300.000 of them have been married off by the age of 15. Finding its roots in cultural and historical beliefs, stating that girls were inferior to boys, CEMF steals girls their perspectives on appropriate education, economic as well as social development and thus violates their basic human rights.

According to UNICEF, Kenya has the 20th highest absolute number of child brides worldwide, with 23% of Kenyan girls being married off before their 18th birthday. With agreeing on the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), the Republic of Kenya has already taken a fundamental step to ensuring women's and girl's equality. In addition to this, we specified further on the issue of CEMF in ratifying the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, considering the setting of the minimum age of marriage to 18 years. On an international level the Republic of Kenya also has committed itself to eliminate CEMF by 2030 in line with target 5.3 of the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDGs), which aims to "eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation". On a regional level, we are one of 20 countries in Eastern and Southern Africa, which has committed itself to end CEMF by 2020 under the *Ministerial Commitment on comprehensive sexuality education and sexual and reproductive health services for adolescents and young people in Eastern and Southern African*. Moreover, the Republic of Kenya has launched the *African Union (AU) Campaign to End Child Marriage* in Africa – a campaign from 2014 to 2017, which has been a great success and pushed the ambition of all Member States to specify even more in their efforts. Finally, on a national level, there has been the reform of the Kenyan constitution in 2010, strengthening women's rights. Additionally, Kenya established The *National Plan of Action for Children in Kenya* from 2015 to 2022, whose aim it is to strengthen children's rights and acknowledges that child marriage leads to the abuse of children, while it also highlights the importance on public awareness on this issue.

The Republic of Kenya highly encourages a collaboration between regional organizations, governments and UN-bodies to stop CEMF, since it is hindering the achievement of the SDGs, like SDG 5, 8 or 10. To do so, we think that education is key. Since parents often can't afford to pay the education for their children and instead marry them off, we suggest that a fund for financing girl's education should be created. Inspired by the *Berhane Hewan* program in Ethiopia – which provided income-earning projects for families to send their daughters to school, supported by the World Bank Group – we propose the creation of a fund, that finances educational material or even the whole schooling of girls. In collaboration with the World Bank and Ethiopia we could create a new program on an international level, learning from their experiences with their programme and its results. Through taking a bit of the financial burden off the parents' shoulders, we can ensure a more equal access to education for girls and take a big step towards equality.

II. Supporting the Involvement of Women in Governance and Decision-Making

There is no country in the world, which has fully achieved gender equality. And even though there are a lot of initiatives and programmes supporting the progress of achieving equality, the global community still has a long way to go. Since women are underrepresented in politics, economic growth and progressive development are hindered. They often cannot implement their perspectives in the progress of decision-making, what makes it tough to fight all the societies' (nationally and globally) problems properly und sustainably. Quoting Koffi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations (UN), "[gender] equality is more than a goal in itself. It is a precondition for meeting the challenge of reducing poverty, promoting sustainable development and building good governance".

The Republic of Kenya has taken an important step in 2010 with passing a new advanced, rights-based constitution, which provides new legal framework. It strengthens the rights of women and girls, e.g. with equality requirements into property and inheritance laws, as well as improving their representation in governance. Additionally, we stand in support of several international and regional programmes supporting gender equality. As member of the African Union (AU) we are taking part in the *Agenda 2063*, the continent's strategic framework for an inclusive and sustainable development. In Aspiration 6, the *Agenda 2063* recalls the dependence of Africa's development on the potential of African people, especially women. Furthermore, in the AU's strategy *Gender Equality and Womens's Empowerment*" (GEWE), key pillar 3, concerning leadership and governance, states that "good governance demands equal and effective participation by women". On an international level the Republic of Kenya has committed to the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* (CEDAW), as well as the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* including the *Sustainable Development Goals* (SDG). The need to reach the SDGs by 2030 has just recently been highlighted during the *Nairobi Summit*, the 25th anniversary of the *International Conference on Population and Development* (ICPD) in our capital Nairobi. Together with the government of Denmark and the *United Nations Population Fund* (UNFPA) we held this summit to put new pressure on the commitment of 179 governments to finally and completely implement the ICPD *Programme of Action* from 1994, promoting all kinds of civil, economic and political development. At the summit our deputy president Dr. William Ruto also emphasised our government's commitment to accelerate equal participation of women in our country's policies and economy once more.

The Republic of Kenya is aware of the need to include women in governance and decision-making to support and fasten the development of not only our, but all countries worldwide. We need women in managing positions to achieve new perspectives, so that advanced policies on political, economic and social development can be created. However, cultural beliefs and persistent stereotypes on women – mainly held by men – have been a huge barrier in achieving SDGs 5 and 10 concerning equality, SDG 1 with respect to fighting poverty and SDG 8 standing for decent work and economic growth. Those stereotypes hinder the appreciation of women's important role in governance and decision-making, describing them as inferior to men. Hence, we see our responsibility in intensifying our efforts to eliminate those stereotypes and to remodel cultural beliefs, so that women are finally accepted as equal human beings. To do so, the Republic of Kenya encourages governments to pay more attention on organizations like the *MenEngage Alliance*. Since there are mainly men in leading positions, they are the ones who must promote and also make the change. Therefore, we encourage the implementation of educational programmes, which address and educate on gender issues and shall help to change archaic mindsets on women in managing positions. We want to work and come together with heads of states, minister, parliamentarians, technical experts, civil society organisations, young people, international financial institutions and many more, just like they all have been brought together at the *Nairobi Summit*, to find sustainable solutions on the issue of promoting gender equality. Through including women in governance and decision-making we can fight questions of development from different and new, progressive angles.