



African leaders must unite to deliver on landmark gender accord

Sharm el Sheikh, Egypt (PANA) - African leaders must unite the entire continent in efforts to deliver on the implementation of the landmark accord on women protection and empowerment while urging donors to offer more financial support, gender activists said here Sunday.

Yasmin Jusu-Sheriff, prominent West African women rights activist, said Africa's success in the implementation of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality in Africa depended on the ability of the political leadership to unite people.

"The signing of the Solemn Declaration on Gender Equality was just one part of the job. We need more financial commitments to fully implement the declaration," Jusu-Sheriff, whose organisation has previously won a UN rights award, told PANA.

Jusu-Sheriff is the First Vice President of the Mano River Women's Peace Network (MARWOPNET), a West African rights body which advocates for peaceful co-existence of the three countries - Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone - which share the Mano River.

The organisation was awarded the UN General Assembly Prize for Human Rights in 2003 for its campaign for peace in the region, using a variety of measures to stop conflict and cool down escalating election-related tension in Guinea and Sierra Leone.

"If there is war in one country, there would be war in the entire region and we cannot afford to live with war in the region because we are so interdependent," she said.

Speaking on the sidelines of a Pre-African Union (AU) Consultative meeting on Gender Mainstreaming here Saturday, the women rights activists said political will

was critical to the pursuit of women's empowerment agenda and peaceful co-existence within Africa.

The conference at the Egyptian tourist resort city of Sharm el Sheikh, has been organised by the Femmes Africa Solidarité (FAS), an organisation founded by dedicated African gender rights activists, which spearheaded the campaigns to have the Equality Declaration passed by the African leaders in July 2004.

The Solemn Declaration contains six broad objectives, covering political leadership, peace and security, healthcare for women, education and women's economic empowerment, which countries committed to implement to improve women welfare.

Jusu-Sheriff said MARWOPET had contributed to the implementation of the pact through its peace advocacy campaigns within the three states in West Africa, emerging from bruising political conflicts in recent times.

According to her, the Solemn Declaration was a step in the right direction for Africa, which has enabled the African leaders to give women's political and social rights a "powerful voice" at the very high-levels of government.

"There have been some gains since the signing of the Solemn Declaration. We are seeing that women issues and their protection in conflict are discussed at the highest levels and taken seriously within Africa," Jusu-Sheriff told PANA in an interview here.

She said the African leaders must also devote more time to discussions on the delivery of peaceful elections, non-violent means to acquiring and retaining power and commit more resources in ensuring the widespread participation of the electorate in governance.

The women rights activists have also noted the implementation of the Solemn Declaration was critical to the achievement of poverty goals in Africa. This, the gender experts noted, would help the continent fast-track its war against abject poverty.

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