

WILDAF WEST AFRICA

Newsletter

Women in Law & Developpement in Africa

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EDITORIA

WILDAF IN THE HEART OF TWO EVENTS BEARER OF HOPE FOR PROMOTION OF WOMEN'S RIGHTS IN AFRICA

As it is the tradition, West African WILDAF/FEEDAF national networks organised from November 25 to December 10, 2000 their 16-day campaign against violence against women. This issue of our bulletin is mainly devoted to activities carried out in these countries within the framework of the campaigns.

Furthermore, it gives a report of the meeting of all the African sub-regions civil society working on the draft additional protocol to the African charter on human and peoples rights. This meeting was held within the framework of the follow-up project for the mobilisation of women's rights organisations to the adoption and the ratification of the draft protocol to the African charter on human and peoples rights, a project co-ordinated by the sub-regional office of WILDAF. A major turning point has just been passed in the organisation of the continent civil society in order to achieve a protocol responding to African women's expectations.

We hope that these two events will contribute to substantial promotion of women's rights in Africa.

Enjoy reading our bulletin ! So long !

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Newsletter**

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CAMPAIGN 2000: COMBATING VIOLENCE PERPETRATED AGAINST WOMEN

This year too, with the support of the European Union, Member States of the Wildaf West Africa Network organised the traditional 16-day campaign against violence perpetrated against women, each of them focusing on a particularly disturbing aspect of the phenomenon as experienced at the national level. The echoes which reached the sub-regional office testify to the strong mobilisation of the parties involved.

Burkina: stop social exclusion on the grounds of witchcraft

The objective of campaign 2000 of Wildaf-Burkina was to undertake a vast mobilisation with a view to the adoption of a law against social exclusion on the grounds of witchcraft, in view of the drama which this phenomenon constitutes for many women and the proportions which it assumes at times.

The Wildaf Network, assisted by a national coalition of NGOs intervening on issues of women's rights and citizenry, the Ministry of Women's Affairs and other women's rights defence NGOs and associations urged the law-makers to adopt such a legislation.

With the additional support of CECI, DCF, a Canadian NGO, the procession "Stop social exclusion on the grounds of witchcraft" was launched. Earlier on, members of the network had established contact in the various cities through which the procession was expected to pass with the most renowned human rights protection associations so that they can sensitize the population for an effective mobilisation during the passage of the procession. Visits were undertaken to the local, administrative, customary and religious authorities with a view to enlisting their support for the planned event.

The procession composed of members of the Wildaf Office, Member Associations and a drama troupe, passed through eight towns, staged a play produced for this purpose each before a large audience in the presence of several personalities. Each performance was followed by a discussion during which the audience expressed its strong indignation. The play recounted the story of an old widow by name Silga, whose only son had travelled to Côte d'Ivoire for several years without any news being heard about him to the extent that everybody thought that he was dead. When a measles epidemics broke out in the village in which the old woman was living and left several children dead, when the charlatan was consulted, he pinpointed the old woman as the cause of the various deaths. Even though she claimed her innocence, she was expelled from her village and her hut burnt down. She then found refuge in a women's home for expelled witches in Ouagadougou. Later on, her son who was thought to be dead and returned to the village could not be told the truth. He understood the situation and left in search of his mother who, unfortunately was already dead.

The first performance which was staged in Ouagadougou at the National Theatre to mark the opening of the campaign was attended by several personalities representing Ministers, Ambassa-

dors, United Nations Agencies, etc. The other performance in the regions took place in the popular leisure centres, theatre or cinema halls. Populations in the provinces were the most mobilised, since in some towns, the halls were filled to capacity and no one was allowed any longer to enter the halls. The play generated the expected effect namely, a general public disapproval of and firm commitment to combat this phenomenon as well as the public debate which followed each performance.

A greater part of the population was reached through the production and broadcast on the national television network of a short documentary on the issue, following this documentary, several telephone calls were made to Wildaf requesting a repeat broadcast.

In order to maintain the mobilisation which was obtained, a support counselling follow-up activity was planned for the post-campaign period. It will consist in working sessions with a number of provincial committees and the production of a radio broadcast at the provincial level on the theme. In the same vein, other provinces will be covered, villages where exclusion on the grounds of witchcraft is very high. In these provinces and cities the theatre forum will be repeated and associated with other activities.

Finally, the contacts established during the campaign with the authorities particularly with the parliamentarians will be maintained until the adoption of a law against this phenomenon from which women of a certain age group in particular suffer.

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Togo: Halt to sexual harassment

Wildaf-Togo embarked, this year, on a war against the sexual harassment of the youth. The choice of this theme was dictated by the incessant complaints received by a number of member organisations in recent years on the issue of sexual harassment of young school girls.

During the press conference which marked the opening of the campaign, the journalists were able to interview Wildaf officials on sexual harassment and on its scope in Togo.

Several teams subsequently visited the schools of which over forty are in Lome or 10,668 schools, 242 teachers and administrative personnel as well as 500 persons from different walks of life. An identical action was undertaken in a number of towns in the hinterland particularly in the Centre and the North.

The sensitisation consisted in presenting three sketches on video cassette presenting the case of three victims of sexual harassment, a school girl, an apprentice hairdresser and a student. The show was followed by discussions with the students and teachers.

The discussions which were often turbulent between the school children and the teachers, testified to the main interest which this theme generated. They culminated in the formulation of solutions. What was particularly discussed was the difference between sexual harassment and other forms of sexual violence, the protection of victims, the denunciation of the phenomenon, the attitude of victims, that of parents.

At the end of this field action, a day of reflexion on sexual harassment in schools was organised bringing together magistrates and development volunteers...

The presentations were followed by group discussions, a return to the plenary session and a press conference. A first paper presented the theme and outlined strategies for combating this phenomenon; another focused on demonstrating the inadequacy of the existing texts particularly the law of 1984 concerning the protection of young girls and boys enrolled in schools and vocational institutions. Existing experiences on the field in the area of the prevention of sexual harassment was shared. After discussions, three working groups were set up to propose respectively solutions to sexual harassment, measures for the protection of the girl child and a bill aimed at checking this phenomenon.

The discussion in the plenary session made it possible to appraise the wealth of the results of the workshop discussions.

A press conference was organised to wind up the day's activities. It also enabled the press (both private and official) and different radio stations to disseminate the echoes of this day to the public at large.

In different other words, the network endeavoured to reach the general public. A basic document on sexual harassment was prepared for members of Wildaf, as well as leaflets and posters placed at the disposal of the general public. In addition, this campaign enlisted the support and cooperation of other stakeholders already involved in the field such as the school press.

International radio stations were

also involved in this campaign. This is the case of Radio France International which carried an interview by the President of Wildaf-Togo and BBC which reported on the event in its French Service...

During the entire campaign, Wildaf-Togo wanted to carry across a strong message namely sexual harassment as a reality on which attention should be focused and that nothing could justify the harassment of a girl whom we are duty-bound to educate and train.

Different reactions following this mobilisation testify to this impact. An example of this is the contact established with the national office by a New York Editor in order to have information on the matter or still by a firm of local consultants in order to procure posters and leaflets prepared for the campaign.

Domestic violence, traditions and excision: tackling the evil at the roots in Mali

Domestic violence, traditions and excision in relation with Malian traditions were at the core of awareness-creation activities organised by Wildaf-Mali from 25 November to 10 December 2000.

During the four broadcasts to the general public, experts, resource persons, members of Wildaf and journalists joined hands to highlight the factors which influence and perpetuate domestic violence and excision and their impact on the socio-economic and psychological development of the woman and the importance of the effective involvement of the media,

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traditional chiefs and religious leaders, human rights NGOs and the involvement of civil society in general.

Discussions-debates were organised in different localities by Wildaf member associations and brought together local administrative, religious and traditional officials and civil society. A popular play or sketches followed by debates were presented in the localities where Wildaf member associations exist in the presence of elected representatives, neighbourhood chiefs, traditional, religious leaders, representatives of all associations and NGOs operating in these areas, the youth, etc. These activities were covered by the local radio stations and made ensure that its echo was boosted.

Press insertions, posters and banners placed at strategic points of the city were used as a supplement to the previous means of sensitisation.

Wildaf-Benin mobilised against domestic violence

Domestic violence also mobilised the energies of Wildaf-Benin for 16 days. Apart from the concern of reaching the largest audience possible, the objective of the network was also to sensitise more particularly officers of the criminal investigations department, magistrates and institutions responsible for receiving complaints concerning violence perpetrated against women and also to undertake an advocacy before the law-maker with a view to the adoption of texts in favour of the women, particularly the law on

female genital mutilations, the code of persons and the family and the signing of the optional protocol to the CEDAW.

With regard to the activities organised to this end, there were two lecture-debates in two Cotonou markets, one day of awareness-creation within the country. The campaign was also extensively covered by the media: television discussions in Fon and French, phone-in radio discussions in the national languages and French – sensitisation spots on the national television network in the national languages and in Fon and French with the support of the Freidrich Hebert Foundation. These programmes made it possible for the women victims of violence to break out of their silence and approach the Wildaf Network.

With regard to the law-maker, the setting up of a pressure group for lobbying and advocacy purposes had started in conjunction with CIAF Benin.

It is with a lot of satisfaction that the Beninese network received a wide range of feedback to its action as a result of which it could not meet all the requests which were made to it. The need for Wildaf-Benin to have an audience centre was strongly felt on this occasion.

Spotlight on economic violence in Senegal

This year, the Senegalese campaign, the second of its type to be organised by Wildaf-Senegal, concerned the economic aspects of violence, particularly the theme poverty and violence. This choice is explained by the current economic situation,

increased impoverishment and the resurgence of acts of violence in families and in the streets in recent years. If the theme was dealt with in its entirety, a special focus was put on the abandonment of the family.

In order to reach the public, the network chose to organise lectures in the different regions of the country delivered by an islamic expert and a legal expert in order to tackle the theme from both the religious and legal angle. The meeting was held on all occasions in the presence of the local administrative authorities.

Lectures were given in Dakar, Thiès, Diourbel and the Kaolack/Fatick section.

During these lectures, the link between poverty and the violence perpetrated against women was highlighted. It was explained that discrimination against women, particularly access to land, inputs, decision-making spheres maintain them in a constant state of poverty and dependence which facilitates all types of violence against her such as forced or early marriage, or the abandonment of the family. It was however observed that the economic emancipation of women, which is poorly tolerated by men is generally a pretext for other forms of violence, physical in particular. The case of the abandonment of the family and its legal sanctions were highlighted and the recourse channels open to women were indicated. At any rate, economic recession is not an excuse to shun the duties required of him by law.

The viewpoint of Islam strengthens this first analysis. This religion prohibits economic violence against

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women, compels men to accommodate women at where they stay and spells out the conditions under which they can be separated.

The debates which followed the presentations made it possible to receive contributions, testimonies and respond to the different questions such as the viewpoint of Islam on divorce, the home of the married woman, when the man is abroad, repudiation, the contribution of women to household expenses, other forms of violence etc.

Prizes for the most effective practices of combating violence against women in Nigeria

In Nigeria, the 16 days of the 2000 campaign provided an opportunity for network members to evaluate the impact of past related activities. The awareness-creation was marked by three events: a press conference, a seminar on the best practices of combating violence against women with a prize-giving ceremony and a conference on the financial management of NGOs.

The purpose of the press conference was to inform the public through the press, the campaign programme and highlight the adverse effects of violence against women. During the seminar on the best practices against violence against women,

award-winning activities were presented by the associations which had won prizes. As members of Wildaf in competition activities carried out in the past in connection with the fight against violence against women. Six of these activities were selected by the national office and awarded prizes in the form of plaques whereas two others received certificates as consolation prizes. FIDA Anambra supported the market women who were evicted from their stalls by the local authorities who had planned to rebuild the stalls in order to rent them at a much higher prices to these women whereas the latter, in general, have very limited resources. Through the mobilisation of FIDA, the crisis was resolved peacefully and a reasonable rent was agreed upon. The Women, Law and Development Centre, Nigeria was awarded a prize for the production of a video documentary on the various forms of violence perpetrated against women, whereas the legal research and Development Centre Nigeria was awarded a prize for the document produced on its activities since 1990. With regard to women's consortium of Senegal, it also received a prize for its production of an e-mail series sent to 6,000 persons on women-trafficking and titled "*Nigerian Girls on Sale*".

The objectives of the production of the documents on the best

practices of combating violence against women, specific activity financed by UNIFEM, were to evaluate, as the impact of the various activities concerning the fight against violence, set up a data bank on these activities and provide the NGOs with an information guide and examples of effective practices of combating violence against women so as to share the experience gained with the other NGOs.

GHANA

A workshop was held in Ghana within the framework of the 16-days campaign. During the workshop, the causes of violence against women, legal solutions and their effectiveness, legal vacuums, and the reasons for the non-recourse of women to justice were examined. Participants reflected not only on the legal solution but also on the other remedies to violence against women.

The legal responses include, inter alia a recommendation for the adoption of various laws particularly a text against inhuman and degrading widowhood, a law on physical domestic violence, recognition of marital rape or still a law to promote women's participation in decision-making.

With regard to the non-legal measures, recommendations were made concerning the education of women, the building of their

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THE CIVIL SOCIETY OF ALL THE AFRICAN SUB-REGIONS AGREED TO SUPPORT THE PROCESS OF THE PROTOCOL TO THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES RIGHTS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

It was held in Bamako (Mali), Hôtel Mandé, from 12 to 15 February, 2001, a regional workshop on the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples Rights on Women's Rights. The workshop was organised by the Syndicat Autonome des Magistrats du Mali (*Malian autonomous union of magistrates*), within the framework of the project "follow-up of NGOs contribution to the development and adoption of the additional protocol to the African Charter on human and peoples rights on women's rights". This project which is backed by the Rights and Citizenry of Women in Francophone Africa DCF/CECI project, with the financial support of ACDI, brings together the following regional networks and institutions:

- L'Union Inter africaine des Droits de l'Homme *African Union of Human Rights* (UIDH)
- Le Conseil sous-régional de la Lutte Contre les Pratiques Traditionnelles Néfastes *Sub-regional Council Against Harmful Traditional Practices* (CPTN)
- Women in Law and Development in Africa (WILDAF/FeDDAF)
- African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR).

About thirty participants representing networks, institutions and organisations of women's rights from all the Central, Southern, East, West and North Africa sub-regions took part in this workshop. The main objectives of the workshop were to enable the networks involved in the action to support the process of the protocol in West Africa, to share ideas with

the civil society of the various sub-regions and harmonise the strategies of all the sub-regions for the adoption and ratification of the protocol.

The major outcome of these deliberations is that the civil society of the sub-regions represented agreed on the common strategies to support the process of adoption and ratification of the protocol. The adoption of strategies was preceded by a review of the political, economic and social environment peculiar to the countries and sub-regions.

An environment globally conducive for the adoption of the protocol despite foreseeable resistances and conflicts

During its deliberations, the workshop pointed out some elements of the national and sub-regional environment likely to positively or negatively influence the adoption, ratification and implementation of the protocol. Thus, the workshop noted that in certain countries, especially in the West, East and Southern Africa sub-regions, there exists a political and legal environment favourable to the promotion of women's rights and to the adoption of the protocol.

However, in these very countries, one should take into account some socio-cultural resistances which remain very strong and which could be, or which are already, in certain areas, translated into the organisation of very active religious groups which are opposed to the emancipation of women and to the adoption of a strong protocol. The analysis of the prevailing environment highlighted the persistent crises and armed conflicts in many countries of Central Africa and in parts of West Africa.

With regard to North Africa, the context is marked in some countries by a strong religious and arabo-muslim culture influence as well as by political systems which are not favourable so far to the right to freedom of association or to the promotion of some of the fundamental rights of women.

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economic capacity, greater participation of women in decision-making and a change in cultural behaviours. Once again, the West Africa Wildaf Network has demonstrated its capacity to mobilise itself to carry out an intensive concerted action of combating violence against women and often, the impact of such an action was immediately felt, numerous telephone calls were made to the national network, the collapse of the wall of silence behind, which until then, women victims of violence had hidden.

It is important to ensure that this result lasts. It also emerged that a proper preparation of these events is a key factor for their success as in Burkina. Nor where the difficulties lacking, far from that, but the will to advance women's rights was strong. Campaign 2000 also revealed the improvement of the aptitude of the national networks to mobilise funds, which is a clear sign of a reinforced capacity.

THE CIVIL SOCIETY OF ALL THE AFRICAN SUB-REGIONS AGREED TO SUPPORT THE PROCESS OF THE PROTOCOL TO THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES RIGHTS ON WOMEN'S RIGHTS

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As a result of these findings, the workshop identified strategies and common actions applicable at national, sub-regional and regional levels. These are summarised below:

At national level: an advocacy intended for target groups playing an inescapable role towards the adoption and ratification of the protocol

- Undertake an advocacy with the Ministries concerned with the process of adoption, ratification and implementation of the protocol (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Ministry for the Promotion of Women, Ministry of Human Rights in order to influence the content of the protocol and the attitude of the countries about the protocol as well as the choice of the experts.
- Undertake an advocacy with national experts and invite them to participate in workshops on the Protocol, in press conferences, hold discussions with them so as to influence them favourably.
- Undertake an advocacy with parliamentarians and especially with Law Commissions and Social Commissions with responsibility for Women issues, for female Parliamentarians.
- Conduct sensitisation and mobilisation actions for the civil society and in this regard, identify problem groups which are opposed to some sensitive issues dealt with in the

protocol and organise information workshops on the protocol (religious groups, traditional and customary chiefs) to persuade them to support the protocol and, as appropriate, form alliances with these groups.

- Conduct sensitisation actions for the population. To that end the contribution of media will be necessary. They should be sensitised in order to overcome their resistance and to lend support to the cause.
- Build and strengthen the capacity of NGO and civil society associations through training in lobbying, advocacy and networking.
- Conduct sensitisation campaigns in favour of women's organisations and associations, in particular grassroots associations very active in some countries. In countries where women associations and NGOs are not accustomed to working together, such in North Africa, it should be necessary to initiate a networking processes at the same time.
- Carry out information campaigns also for the benefit of political parties and their women's movements and law practitioners.

At the sub-regional level: lobbying with various institutions and capacity building of organisations involved in the action undertaken in the countries.

- **Lobbying with sub-regional groupings such as ECOWAS, UEMOA, CEMAC,**

ECOWAS Parliament, Arab Institute for Human Rights, SADC, Centre for Arab Women, Francophonie and sub-regional representations of international organisations including the sub-regional centres for development of the ECA, the African Centre for Women, UNIFEM, UNHCR, UNPFA, UNDP in order to get them involved in advocacy actions with decision-makers and support the process under way.

- Building the capacities of national follow-up committees and of members of networks and organisations which did not participated in the initial phase of the process. Capacity building will be carried out through training of trainers in advocacy, lobbying and training in networking.
- Searching for other networks likely to get involved in the mobilisation in order to support the process.

At the regional level: Lobbying with the OAU Secretariat and regional institutions

- Follow-up and lobbying with the OAU Secretariat (visits to the OAU headquarters, participation in OAU meetings and in sessions of the African Commission);
- Identify NGO networks and those institutions with OAU Observer Status in order to involve them in lobbying actions with this organisation;
- Organise meetings with the OAU Secretary General and the President of the OAU;

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- At the regional level, it is important to support the development of networking of women's associations working in the area of prevention, management and resolution of conflicts.

In order that these actions succeed and be maximised, the workshop has also proposed some co-ordination strategies.

**Co-ordination strategies
at sub-regional and
regional levels**

The workshop proposed, at the national level, the extension to other countries of the West African sub-region and other sub-regions of the existing steering committees in 7 West African countries.

At the sub-regional level:

The workshop proposed the establishment of a co-ordination committee which will comprise those networks already involved in the process, while at the same time stressing the need to avoid a cumbersome, ineffective and costly structure.

At the regional level:

The workshop proposed the setting-up of a committee comprising the representatives of sub-regional co-ordination committees to ensure the follow-up and co-ordination activities. The committee will include:

- 3 representatives from West Africa
- 1 anglophone
- 1 francophone

- 1 lusophone
- 1 representative from Central Africa
- 1 representative from East Africa
- 2 representatives from Southern Africa including 1 anglophone
- 1 lusophone
- 1 representative from North Africa

With regard to the time frame, we note that the draft protocol is with the OAU and is intended to be submitted to the Heads of State and Government at the Lusaka Summit which is scheduled to take place in July 2001. We also note that draft protocol requires further revision and amendment by the civil society and government experts and that in the event that such further revisions and amendments would delay its adoption in July 2001, that the said instrument be adopted during the Summit of heads of State and Government in July 2002.

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