

## The African Network of Women Shelters (ANWS)

### Kigali Call to Action

We, the members of the African Network of Women Shelters (ANWS) Steering Committee and partners from Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, South Africa and Zimbabwe;

Recognizing the outcomes of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Conferences of the Global Network of Women Shelters (GNWS) held in Edmonton-Canada in September 2008 and Washington DC–USA in February 2012;

Observing that violence against women (VAW) remains one of the major challenges in Africa and globally;

We welcome the 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) and States' consideration to address the challenge under the theme "Elimination and Prevention of All Forms of Violence Against Women and Girls";

We also affirm the Statement of the NGO Committee on the Status of Women/Africa at the forthcoming 57<sup>th</sup> Session of the Commission on the Status of Women;

We note the following:

Violence against women is a major obstacle to women attaining equality, development and peace, and prevents women from enjoying their human rights and fundamental freedoms and a life of dignity free from oppression. Many women want to escape the violence and find refuge and safety because their homes or communities are unsafe. But the vast majority cannot find refuge and safety. They may seek safety and peace by going to safe spaces, such as shelters, refuges, women's centers, or transition homes, to seek peace and safety. In these spaces, women and their children who have had violence perpetrated upon them could find refuge, compassion, resources, and assistance.

Women's centers and safe spaces, where they exist in Africa, provide life saving services to women fleeing violence, often working in dangerous places with minimal support, resources and protection. Cultural barriers often inhibit these centers from operating openly and this means that victims often face a lifetime of discrimination, stigmatization, poverty, and increased risk of further victimization.

As set out in the Vienna Declaration and Programme of Action in 1993, Member States asserted that "gender-based violence and all forms of sexual harassment and exploitation...are incompatible with the dignity and worth of the human person, and must be eliminated." Since then, States have reaffirmed their commitment to ending violence against women through the adoption of the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW). Others include the Beijing Platform for Action, the

agreed conclusions of the 42<sup>nd</sup> and 51st sessions of the CSW, and UN Security Council resolutions 1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, and 1960, and UN Security Council Resolutions 1261, 1379 and 1612 on children in armed conflict.

In Africa, States have committed to the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, and the Great Lakes Region Protocol on the Suppression and Prevention of Sexual Violence Against Women and Children.

Despite these commitments, violence against women and children persists as a widespread and pervasive human rights violation. States have clear and concrete obligations under their constitutions and international commitments they have signed and ratified to prevent such violence, prosecute and punish perpetrators, and provide redress and relief to victims and survivors of violence. In addition states that have not ratified also have a moral obligation to sign and ratify all treaties and protocols geared towards ending violence against women and girls.

We emphasize the lack and/or inadequate provision of women's centers and safe spaces in States across Africa. The African Network of Women Shelters therefore calls on African governments to:

- enact and implement policies and legislation to establish and support shelters and safe spaces for women and girls in Africa;
- strengthen political will and invest and allocate funds for survivors of violence to guarantee service provision and access safe spaces and refuges. We note the importance of women driven shelters and safe spaces in women survivors' confidence building, and thus the need for their support with appropriate infrastructure to offer holistic interventions with prevention on GBV and women empowerment programs.
- We call on governments to maintain accountability and transparency in State reconstruction by including women's needs and priorities, women's human rights including access to justice, and representation and participation in peace processes.
- We call on governments and civil society to provide confidential and secure domestic and sexual violence interventions and provision of specialist services that meet the needs of a diversity of women, including the disabled, elderly and refugees, who are currently underserved by existing services.
- We call on governments, civil society and aid agencies to:
  - strengthen policies and decrees and their facilitation as related to VAW and gender-based violence,
  - ensure the policies are fundamental in initiating and sustaining women's centres and safe spaces,
  - are holistic, integrated and include community level awareness raising programmes done in a rights-based, gender and culturally sensitive manner, and
  - integrate gender-based violence in school curricula as a means of primary prevention.
- We encourage Governments to put in place mechanisms to coordinate and harmonize service provision by various Government departments and civil society organizations in health,

education, economic development and other social services. This should include monitoring and evaluation

- We urge governments, civil society and aid agencies to focus on strengthening and supporting women-to-women shelter exchange learning, documentation, collection and management of data which is essential for providing improved holistic responses.

Done in Kigali on this 5<sup>th</sup> day of December 2012.