

WDN-AFRICA STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL DAY OF DEMOCRACY 2023

Call for the Acceleration of Young Women's Participation in Democratic Processes in Africa

September 15, 2023

Women's Democracy Network Africa (WDN-AFRICA), a vibrant network of exceptional women political leaders influencing women's rights and gender equality in Africa joins the world in commemorating the International Day of Democracy on September 15, 2023. As the world commemorates this day, WDN-Africa celebrates women and the role they continue to play in ensuring Africa's resilience through her growing democratization processes.



WDN Africa is cognizant of the fragile democratization process in some parts of Africa with a trend in coups in some countries on the continent. Coups threaten the participation of citizens' most especially women and young women who are marginalized even in stable democracies. WDN Africa is deeply concerned about the low leadership representation and participation of young women in their diversity in governance processes in most countries on the African continent. The marginalization of especially young women who are the majority of the population on the continent manifests in systemic discrimination based on age, gender, harmful religious and cultural practices and is significantly drawing back on Africa's collective democratization agenda. Violence against women with impunity and coup d'états¹ are creating a

political culture and environment that deters young women from participating in the governance of their countries. This is coupled with time poverty due to unpaid care work and reproductive roles that continue unaddressed and therefore shortchange young women's potential.

Young women's contribution and participation in democracy processes remain largely unacknowledged. On media platforms, young women remain largely invisible thereby affecting public acknowledgement and appreciation of their potential as leaders. Structural barriers against young women in political parties further exacerbate the triple marginalization that they face in the structures of political parties where they are tossed between the women's wing and youth league with uncertainty on where they belong in the party. Lack of policy clarity which defines parameters and regulates meaningful positioning of young women for leadership and decision-making opportunities, lack of access to information and skills, lack of capacity building opportunities and resources and lack of political

¹ Sudan, Niger, Gabon, Mali, Burkina Faso and failed coup attempts in Guinea Bissau, the Gambia and the Island nation of Sao Tome.

commitment and action by leaders to mainstream young women in the life and work of political parties undermines their contribution to the goals of their respective political parties and ultimately keeps young women outside positions and power spaces in the broader democratization discourse.

Political and election rigging and malpractices with impunity that have characterized elections in various countries on the Africa continent and lack of respect by leaders for the authority of the people of respective African countries on their will and consent of who should govern them through free and fair elections continues to affect the democratization process in Africa. The normalization of sexual exploitation and abuse in political parties, use of rape as a weapon of war and political contestation, violence against women and girls in public, private and online spaces also disturbingly are key drivers of young women not taking up political leadership opportunities. WDN Africa is cognizant of the effects of the conflict driven roll back in democracy on the participation of women in decision making. This is usually reflected in a decrease in the numbers of women in decision making, in the lack of influence of the few who get into positions of decision making even when they are elected or appointed into positions of authority, thereby negatively affecting their ability to influence decisions to transform the lives of women and girls whom they should substantively represent.

With these challenges and obstacles in mind. WDN Africa calls upon women and men, young and old in their diversity in all African countries to amplify their voices and agency to call for duty bearers to act and implement national, regional and international commitments to increase young women's representation in political leadership and decision-making processes. We call for implementation of country specific Constitutional provisions to ensure that public resources and affairs are managed effectively for the good of all citizens, and for the holding of free, fair and credible elections. WDN-Africa urges all governance oversight institutions including Human Rights Commissions, SADC, ECOWAS and African Union to exercise their mandate and ensure restoration of rule of law in countries affected by different forms of conflict. WDN Africa calls upon all countries that are preparing for elections to enforce mechanisms including affirmative action for young women to graduate from being mobilized to vote to be candidates, appointed to ministries and high-level governance leadership positions including ambassadorial posts. We further call for respect for political diversity, for the roles and mandates of Electoral Commissions and the will of the citizens who exercise their power through the vote.



We also call upon young women to take up leadership opportunities where opportunities present themselves and seek support for their growth and leadership development through training, coaching and mentorship. We call upon senior women political leaders to continue being role models and to support young women's participation in decision making processes through creating spaces, opportunities for intergenerational linking and learning as well as enacting policies and enforcement of mechanisms to create an enabling environment for young women's participation. We call upon men to play their part in supporting young women in all areas of their lives especially girls' education and for the

media to profile and make visible young women's voices to instill public confidence in young women leaders. We further call upon governments on the African continent to review and update education curriculums to ensure that girls' and boys' access political education to support democracy and its ideals for the development of their respective countries. WDN Africa remains committed and ready to connect women political leaders to take collective action and to amplify their voices to address the rollback on democracy on the Africa continent. Sustainable democracy is possible and calls for urgent and consistent investment in empowering the next generation through policy, practices, and creation of an enabling environment that values and deliberately takes actions to mainstream young women's participation in the democratization processes of their countries for gender equality. //