



Dakar, 11 October 2025

DAKAR DECLARATION FOR GIRLS IN WEST AND CENTRAL AFRICA

Preamble

Ahead of the West and Central Africa Girls Summit, twenty-four countries across the region organized broad consultations with girls and key stakeholders. The objective of the consultations was to identify key priorities and strategies that hamper or facilitate the realization of girls' rights. The following Declaration is the culmination of this process, and reflects girls' voices, their demands, and their call for urgent action.

Grounded in our shared determination to make the voices, realities, and aspirations of girls in West and Central Africa heard and acted upon, we come together to reaffirm our rights and call for urgent change. Across our region, millions of girls continue to face barriers that prevent them from learning, being safe, healthy, and free to shape their own futures. This Declaration is our collective response, a statement of hope, leadership, and accountability.

Our call is rooted in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the Sustainable Development Goals, the African Union's Agenda 2063, and Africa's Agenda for Children 2040. These global and regional instruments affirm our right to equality, education, safety, health, participation, and dignity, and call upon States and all actors in West and Central Africa to ensure that every girl can thrive and realize her full potential.

Among the milestones that have shaped the global movement for gender equality, the World Conference on Women held in 1995 adopted the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action, a historic blueprint for realizing the rights of all women and girls. This landmark plan identified twelve critical areas of concern, including a dedicated chapter on the rights and well-being of girls and adolescents.

Today, thirty years later, **we, the girls of West and Central Africa**, inspired by these global and regional instruments, raise our voices to renew that chapter and advance the aspirations of all girls in our region.

While recognizing our governments' commitments to girls' rights and well-being through national policies and programs, **we remain concerned** that significant challenges persist.

During the national consultations, we highlighted our difficulties: limited access to quality education, insufficient health services, constant threats to our mental and physical well-being, and a lack of safe spaces to express our views, all of which are increasingly worsened by climate impacts and environmental degradation. We also spoke about corporal punishment, the lack of intergenerational dialogue, cultural and structural barriers to free expression, and digital risks such as misinformation, online harassment, and the absence of safe digital environments. Too many of us live in crisis or conflict settings, including those caused by climate-induced disasters, without adequate protection or clear prospects for the future.

To the Heads of State and Governments of Our Region

Dear Presidents of West and Central African countries, represented today by **His Excellency Mr. Bassirou Diomaye Diakhar FAYE**,

We, the girls of West and Central Africa, affirm our rights and priorities as follows.

Our Right to Education

- Girls' education changes the world. We are not here only to be helped; we are agents of change.
- We demand **equal access to safe quality inclusive education** for all girls, with **scholarships** for those who cannot afford school fees.
- We are concerned with the fact that today there are over **57 million** out of school children in West and Central Africa; we urge countries to address this critical issue.
- We ask that **all girls**, including girls with disabilities and those outside formal schooling, can **participate in alternative learning pathways**, school clubs and associations.
- Many girls do not know their rights. We call for **laws protecting girls to be taught in schools** and popularized in our communities.
- We ask for **strengthened health education** to prevent early and unwanted pregnancies.
- We want to know our rights, receive **financial education**, and **refuse silence in the face of injustice**.
- We want to learn **technology and innovation** in safe, protected environments; and we call for urgent **measures to guarantee continuity of education** in times of climate shock, conflict, displacement, or crisis, including digital learning opportunities that bridge the gap between rural and urban girls.

Our Right to Health and Well-being

- We ask for **access to quality healthcare**, including sexual and reproductive health, must be free or affordable and accessible, especially for girls without resources and girls with disabilities.
- If we are pregnant or already having childcare responsibility, we want **respectful and quality health services** which help us and our children not only to **survive but to thrive**.
- Many girls suffer from depression, yet no one talks about it. We call for **inclusive safe spaces** and **adolescent mental health support services**.

Our Right to Access Water, Sanitation and Hygiene

- We affirm that **access to safe water, sanitation, and hygiene (including menstrual health)** is essential to our dignity, safety, health, and equal participation in education and society.
- We demand **clean water and safe sanitation** for all girls, with **private, functional, and inclusive** facilities in every school and community.
- We call for **access to menstrual products and information**, including in school and health facilities, so that girls can manage menstruation with **dignity and confidence**.
- We request governments and partners to commit to **breaking the silence and stigma around menstruation**, through open dialogue and education for all.

- We urge action to **reduce the burden of water collection** on girls, so we are protected from risks and have more time to study and thrive.

Our Right to Protection

- We denounce **female genital mutilation**, which continues despite existing laws, and demand **real monitoring of their enforcement**.
- We call for an **end to child marriage** because we want to pursue our education and other dreams and opportunities. We demand that the **legal age of marriage be set at 18 and fully respected**.
- We **condemn gender-based violence**, which threatens our health, safety, and future, and we demand **strict laws and clear sanctions** against perpetrators.
- We reject **social norms, stereotypes, and gender-based discrimination** that limit our aspirations.
- We insist on the **inclusion of girls with disabilities** in all decisions, actions, and programs concerning girls, with the **accessibility and support required** to ensure their equal participation.
- We demand **special protection of our rights in times of crisis and conflicts**.
- We denounce **child trafficking, online exploitation, and cyber violence** targeting girls, and we call for **accountability mechanisms** to ensure perpetrators are prosecuted and survivors supported.
- We call for **urgent action on climate change**, recognizing its **disproportionate impact** on girls' health, education, protection, and livelihoods. We demand that governments **include girls in climate action plans** and provide resources to build resilience, especially for those in rural and most vulnerable communities.

Our Right to Participation and Information

- We call for **awareness campaigns on gender equality**, especially in schools and communities.
- We want to **reach girls in remote areas** who lack access to information so that **no girl is left behind**.
- We want our **dignity to be protected on social media**, no bullying, no stigmatization.
- We demand to be actively **included in local, national, and regional decision-making spaces**, from school councils to government forums, so that **our voices help shape the policies and programmes that affect our lives**.

We Call on Governments, Regional and International Partners, and All Stakeholders to:

- **Listen to and respect our voices** in all decisions that concern us.
- **Break taboos** and create **safe inclusive spaces** so girls can speak freely.
- **Train professionals** to provide accessible services adapted to the needs of all girls.
- **Monitor the implementation** of laws, programs, and commitments so that our rights become a reality.

Aware of our essential role and responsibility in transforming our lives and achieving our rights, we, the girls of this region, commit here in Dakar to be agents of change alongside all partners working to protect and promote our rights:

We therefore commit to:

- **Make education our priority** by staying in school, supporting our sisters, and advocating for inclusive, quality and climate-smart education.
- **Raise our voices** in local, national, and regional fora so that our priorities are heard and acted upon.
- **Use technology and innovation responsibly** to strengthen our leadership and solidarity.
- **Support our boy counterparts** as they progressively become good examples of positive and responsible masculinity.
- **Build networks of support and mentorship** so that every girl can develop her potential and contribute to the progress of her community.
- **Mobilize our peers** and inform adolescent networks about the commitments made at this Summit.
- **Work with institutions and decision-makers** at all levels to implement and monitor this Declaration, which we call, **thirty years after Beijing, the “Dakar Declaration and Program of Action for Girls in West and Central Africa.”**
- **Work with governments and partners** to ensure **adequate financing for girls’ rights**, and we call for **annual progress reviews**, so our voices are continuously heard.

“As girls of this region, we know that when one of us rises, we all rise.

We are not just the future, we are the present, with voices that carry strength, courage, and hope.

By lifting each other up, breaking barriers, and daring to dream bigger, we are shaping a world where every girl is safe, educated, and free to lead.

Together, we are unstoppable, and together, we will make our vision for girls’ rights a reality.”

- Girl representative from the Regional Girl Advisory Group