

# Respecting the Maputo protocol Adopted in 2003, African Union

## Cameroon's Failing Human Rights Obligations

The Maputo Protocol aka Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, is considered to be the ground-breaking vessel in its recognition, protection, and promotion of African women's rights in the areas of violence against women, governance, health, and reproductive rights. Adopted in July 2003 and came into effect in November 2005 signaled the commitment of African states towards ensuring women's rights and security. Cameroon supports this commitment and ratified signed the Protocol in July 2006. But despite its commitment, the grandiosity does not look to match action and women's rights in Cameroon have for the most part been neglected and equality and security for women remain elusive.

Cameroon has been embroiled in a war in the Anglophone regions. The situation of women affected by these conflicts continues to demand immediate attention and intervention. There have been frequent reports of sexual violence committed against women and women have been bearing the brunt of the conflict. Of all the humanitarian crisis that has ensued, women account for about 51% of the internally displaced persons (IDPs). And these Internal displacement exposes the vulnerability and victimization of affected women to economic, physical and sexual violence. The continued conflicts and insecurity shows the continuous manifestations of violence towards women, their human rights violations and the total failure on the part of the government of Cameroon to enforce these rights as rectified by them and enshrined in the Maputo Protocol. The level of violence and violations women in the conflict torn anglophone regions are subjected to not only affect mental health but obstruct their rights to dignity, to life, integrity and security of their being, lessens their right of participation in the political and decision-making process, right to peace, right to food security and protection in the armed conflicts.

The Maputo Protocol foist general obligations on States and these entail the moral imperative to protect, to respect, to fulfill and to promote. The Cameroonian state (has signed and ratified this protocol) and is therefore

obligated to respect and protect the rights of all Cameroonian women especially women in anglophone conflict ravaged regions. The commitment to protect requires government of Cameroon to take vital actions to prevent even non-state actors from obstructing the freedom or enjoyment of women's rights. The Cameroon government is compelled to promote and establish conducive social, legal and economic environments and favorable conditions that allows women to exercise their rights. Cameroon as a state must abstain from directly or indirectly hindering women's rights. Mindful of its obligations and considering its duties when it pertains to violence against women, the government of Cameroon must respect and enforce the a standard review. This standard obliges Cameroon as a nation state to carry out investigation, prevent and align its domestic laws to punish all acts of violence against women regardless of who commits them.

Considering its human rights obligations under the Maputo Protocol, it is important for the government of Cameroon to restore peace within the conflict ravaged regions of Anglophone. The war-torn regions continue to have negative consequences on anglophone women and the women in the conflict regions are in dire need of protection. Unrealized sexual and reproductive rights continue to harm women and Cameroon's reservation to article 14 of the Maputo Protocol as it relates to abortion continues to threaten the overall goal, intent and benefits of the Maputo Protocol which are to promote and protect women's health and reproductive rights. Liberalize abortion and remove barriers to make it easy for women to access safe abortion which will reduce maternal mortality.

In Conclusion, the critical and most important goal for improving the health and well-being of women and families in anglophone regions is reducing maternal mortality. Cameroon as a state to the Maputo Protocol should recommit to the goals of protecting, respecting, and promoting the rights of Cameroonian women especially women in conflict regions by stopping violence against women.

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