



PRESS STATEMENT

Kampala, Saturday 8th March 2024

Commemoration of International Women's Day 2025

Today, Human Rights Awareness and Promotion Forum (HRAPF) joins the world in commemorating the International Women's Day, 2025. On this day, we join all women across the country to call for accelerated action towards tackling structural prejudices and obstacles that continue to hinder women in all their diversities from enjoying the full range of their rights. This year's theme requires us to focus more on inclusivity and intersectionality. We must therefore recognise the different layers of vulnerability that women in Uganda are struggling with in all their diversities, recognising that gender inequality affects different women in different ways – whether due to race, ethnicity, disability, socio-economic status or other aspects.

On this International Women's Day, HRAPF renews its call for urgent and decisive action to combat stigma and discrimination against structurally marginalised and excluded women, particularly women living with HIV, women engaged in sex work and women belonging to sexual and gender minority groups. These groups of women continue to face profound discrimination, including limited access to healthcare services and intense economic hardships that have been exacerbated by recent upheavals across the world, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the recent disasters from extreme weather conditions across the country and a repressive legal regime that negatively impacts on the sexual and reproductive health and rights of women. This is made worse by the recent reversal of gains made towards women's equality worldwide. The intersection of gender inequality, stigma and socio-economic status continues to render structurally marginalised women particularly vulnerable to human rights abuses, sexual and gender based violence and to illnesses such as HIV/ AIDS.

The Maputo Protocol underscores the obligation of African states to safeguard the rights of women and girls by ensuring access to healthcare, economic opportunities, and protection from violence and exploitation. Nevertheless, statistics indicate that 13.7% of young women in Uganda engage in sex work, for instance, with a staggering HIV prevalence of 33% –far exceeding the national average of 6.5%. The criminalisation of sex work not only heightens the risk of HIV transmission by discouraging health-seeking behaviour but also exposes sex workers to violence at the hands of clients, law enforcement, and other third parties.

Furthermore, the anticipated impact of the US funding freeze threatens access to lifesaving HIV services, essential healthcare, and legal aid services for marginalised communities. As these resources dwindle, further highlighting already existing inadequacies in the health infrastructure, particularly for access to HIV/AIDS prevention, testing, treatment and care services, the most vulnerable women will be disproportionately affected. HRAPF calls upon the government of Uganda to clearly commit to continuing care and services for women, especially the most marginalised in light of the withdrawal of US support. The primary responsibility to fulfil the right to health lies on the Government of Uganda, and not other countries or development partners.

It is therefore time for Uganda to accelerate legal reforms that will create a safer and more just environment for ALL women, including those structurally excluded. This urgently needed legal reform extends to decriminalisation of sex work, repeal of repressive laws like the Anti-Homosexuality Act, 2023 and further decriminalisation and declassification of petty offences like ‘common nuisance.’ These reforms would accelerate critical steps towards ensuring economic justice, safeguarding health rights, and affording all women the dignity and protection they deserve under Uganda’s Constitution.

Taking human rights to all

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