



PRESS RELEASE COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE COMUNICADO DE IMPRENSA

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COVID-19: ECOWAS and its Partners Organize Ministerial and Expert Meetings on Sexual and Gender-based Violence and Status of Girls' and Women's Rights.

The ECOWAS Gender Development Centre (EGDC) is organizing a regional meeting of Experts via videoconference, followed by a Ministerial meeting on: ***“Sexual and Gender-based Violence and the Status of Girls’ and Women’s Rights during the Covid-19 Pandemic and Beyond”*** from 5th to 9th October, 2020. This important meeting, organized in partnership with the NGOs Plan International, UNICEF, World Vision, and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), brings together key stakeholders in the gender sector and the protection of women and girls from the 15 ECOWAS Member States.

This meeting of experts was officially launched today Monday, 5th October, 2020 by the Honourable **Siga Fatima Jagne**, ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender Affairs, after the welcome remarks delivered by Dr Bolanlé Adetoun, Director of EGDC, subsequently followed by speeches delivered by the various partners including GIABA, Plan International, UNICEF, World Vision, OHCHR and the Canada Regional Development Program which have contributed to this crucial theme of sexual and gender-based violence and the protection of women and girls in West Africa.

“.... Our meeting today will provide all the quintessence of ECOWAS reflections on the fight against sexual and gender-based violence during the COVID-19 pandemic and proffer strong recommendations that will be submitted to the Ministers of Gender and Women’s Affairs for adoption....., we are convinced that you will utilize your various experiences and expertise and thorough understanding of Gender issues to provide us with enlightened solutions for our future interventions, to the great delight of our populace, particularly Women and Girls”, The ECOWAS Commissioner for Social Affairs and Gender stated in her keynote address.

This series of ECOWAS ministerial and expert meetings have several objectives. They include, among others, to review the effects of COVID-19 on women and girls, particularly with regard to sexual and gender-based violence and child marriage, as well as opportunities for the empowerment of women and girls; to call for renewed actions relating to the implementation of the ECOWAS Roadmap on the prevention of child marriage; and to share the experiences of ECOWAS Member States relating to their prevention and

response activities on various issues of sexual and gender-based violence prior to and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The experts will also discuss and make recommendations on responses designed to address the escalation of sexual and gender-based violence observed during the COVID-19 pandemic; discuss key advocacy issues on gender, women's and girls' rights and responses to COVID-19, using the "Draft ECOWAS Action Plan on Gender-Sensitive Response to the Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) " as a guide. They will also be called upon to proffer recommendations to reduce the exacerbated inequalities and negative impacts of COVID-19 on the girl child during and after the pandemic, and to review the terms of reference for the establishment of Member States' stakeholders' networks against sexual and gender-based violence;

Finally, the experts will review and recommend a key Declaration for Ministers of Women's Affairs on "Sexual and gender-based violence and the rights of women and girls during the Covid-19 Pandemic"; review and recommend a Draft Declaration for ECOWAS Heads of State and Governments on zero tolerance to all forms of sexual and gender-based violence, at all times and under any circumstance in the ECOWAS region.

It should be recalled that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened the status of women and girls, taking into account all parameters of human security - including economic, food, health, personal, community, environmental, and political security. Conflict situations, epidemics and pandemics have historically exacerbated gender inequalities and discrimination, as well as escalation in gender-based violence - The COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Indeed, worldwide, there has been an alarming escalation in gender-based violence, including in West African countries, and girls and young women have been the most affected, especially in the area of sexual violence.

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