



---

## OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT OF PARLIAMENT

---

### SOADLAW 011

### LAW ON WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

December 20, 2025

Melvin Brown

President

#### Preamble

Before adopting a bill on women's empowerment, it is necessary to bear in mind the history of women in Africa and the Diaspora, the history of their struggles and the challenges they face. As a matter of fact, the social condition of women in Africa has been profoundly shaped by a diverse range of cultures, historical changes, colonial legacies, and ongoing struggles for equality. From the ancient world to the modern era, African women have navigated complex, ever-changing landscapes, simultaneously bound by traditional norms and propelled by their roles as leaders, warriors, artists, scholars, and activists. Despite various social and cultural barriers, they have contributed significantly to the development of their societies. This comprehensive exploration seeks to trace the journey of African women, highlighting their roles throughout history, examining influential figures across various fields, and showcasing their continued fight for equality and empowerment, which is the final objective of this bill.

\*\*\*

In pre-colonial Africa, women held important positions in many societies, playing central roles in governance, family life, economy, religion, and cultural practices. The roles they

played varied significantly across Africa's vast and diverse regions, but women were often seen as pillars of society. In some regions, African cultures were matrilineal, and sometimes partly matriarchal, and women controlled land, wealth, and lineage.

One of the earliest and most famous female rulers in African history was Queen Hatshepsut of ancient Egypt. She ruled from 1479 to 1458 BCE and is regarded as one of Egypt's most successful pharaohs. She initiated numerous building projects, expanded Egypt's trade networks, and presided over a prosperous reign. Similarly, the Queen of Sheba, often identified with the Queen Makeda of Ethiopia, played a key role in ancient trade relations between Africa and the Arabian Peninsula. Her famous visit to King Solomon in Israel symbolized a time of prosperity and exchange.

In ancient African history, many other great women should be remembered, like Queen Dido, also known as Elissa, traditionally credited with founding Carthage around the 9th century BCE, or Cleopatra VII, who forged alliances with Julius Caesar and Mark Antony. In Kush (modern-day Sudan), Queen Amanirenas became an icon of resistance. In the 1st century BCE, she successfully repelled Roman forces, maintaining Kushite sovereignty. Queen Dihya, also known as Kahina, is another great example of female resistance. She led Berber forces against Arab invaders during the 7th century.

With the spread of Islam into Africa from the 7th century onwards, the status of women began to be influenced by Islamic laws and teachings. Islam maintained some rights and freedoms to women, such as the right to own property, inherit wealth, and engage in business. Fatimah al-Fihri, who founded the University of Al-Qarawiyyin in Morocco in 859 AD, is one of the most famous female scholars of the Islamic Golden Age. Her institution remains one of the oldest continuously operating educational institutions in the world. However, the patriarchal interpretations of Islamic law also led to many restrictions, particularly in terms of women's public roles.

In Sub-Saharan Africa, women continued to play an important role in many societies. A good example is Queen Nzinga, of the kingdom of Ndongo and the kingdom of Matamba, in present-day Angola. When she came to the throne, she had to oppose the colonial and slavery ambitions of the Portuguese and lead many military battles, with significant success. Among these women of the African nobility who fought against slavery, one could mention Princess Aqualtune Ezgondidu Mahamud da Silva Santos. Daughter of the king of the Congo, she led the soldiers of the kingdom during the battle of Mbwila against the Portuguese, in 1665. More than 5000 men died on this occasion, and she was enslaved. Deported to Ghana, then to Recife, Brazil, she became a slave in a breeding farm, destined to be raped, and thus to increase the "stock" of her masters, but she managed to escape and founded the famous Quilombo dos Palmares in Brazil, one of the most famous places of resistance to slavery.

\*\*\*

From the end of the 15th century onwards, the fate of women of African origin in the diaspora is linked to their situation in the context of colonial slavery. Women were exposed to all the violence experienced by male slaves, and moreover, they were exposed to rape, first by the men on the slave ships, and secondly by their masters, who could both satisfy their

sexual instincts, and at the same time enrich their patrimony, in the event of pregnancy. Women had to work practically until the last day of their pregnancy, and sometimes had to return to the fields the day after giving birth. The gynecological treatments they could receive were extremely rudimentary.

The case of Dr. James Marion Sims, widely regarded as the father of modern gynaecology and inventor of the vaginal speculum, shows that this “care” could even be a real torture, as this 19th-century doctor in the USA performed forced experiments and operations on women, without anaesthesia. One of these women underwent 30 forced operations without anaesthesia.

Despite these challenges, women were active participants in resisting colonial powers. It is often the domestic resistance that leads them to resistance at all. Often it was not for themselves that they would fight, but for their children, and beyond, for the whole community. It is then as mothers that they got involved. They participated in small-scale maroonage, but also in collective actions leading to large-scale maroonage. Enslaved women and free women of color used new forms of resistance, acts of sabotage, disguises, traps, various ruses. They sometimes resorted to infanticide and suicide, notably by drowning, by throwing from the deck of slave ships. Or they would use other means, like Dandara who, captured by the colonial authorities in Brazil, threw herself into the void.

Because of their proximity to the masters, the servants, cooks, and housekeepers had easy access to foodstuffs - they sometimes worked on poisoning. The women participated in a parallel economy in favor of marronage, by facilitating the larceny and theft of livestock, linen, and clothing. They smuggled food, manioc, vegetables in a clandestine manner.

Throughout the period of slavery, women were often involved in the burning of bagasse huts, sugar cane fields and sometimes in the burning of the houses of the masters. They often initiated plots, and did urge individuals to revolt and to forest marronnage, as testified by the Mulâtresse Solitude in Guadeloupe, Heva in Reunion, Cécile Fatiman in Saint Domingue, or Claire in Guyana. Many of them knew the secrets of medicinal plants, a particularly precious resource in this context of violence, torture, wounds and diseases, and this would increase their prestige, that of Nanny, for example, Queen of the Marroons of Jamaica, who gave her name to Nannytown.

Women also participated actively in the urban marronnage by mixing with the floating population of the de facto freemen. They were merchants, laundresses, and washerwomen, and remained on the lookout for strategies for their emancipation. It is often them who animated the assemblies during which the collective decisions were organized, they also led the religious rituals, the political plots, or the decisions of the daily life. Active in the revolts, they also participated in military battles: we know the decisive role that Sanité Belair had in the insurrection in Santo Domingo, Carlota in Cuba or Dandara in Brazil.

\*\*\*

On the continent, women were also involved in the fight against colonialism. Yaa Asantewaa, the Queen Mother of the Ashanti people in modern-day Ghana, became one of the most famous African women in history. In 1900, when British colonizers sought to capture the sacred Golden Stool, Yaa Asantewaa led an army of warriors in a heroic defense of the Ashanti kingdom. Her leadership during the war made her a symbol of resistance against colonial oppression.

In Algeria, in the 1950s, during the war of independence against French colonial rule, women such as Djamila Boupacha and Zohra Drif took part in armed resistance and were instrumental in organizing key campaigns. Zaynab al-Nahhas, who led resistance efforts against the French occupation, became a symbol of female leadership in the struggle for national liberation. These women were not merely bystanders; they were actively involved in combat, espionage, and strategy, demonstrating the centrality of African women in the fight for independence.

In Kenya, women like Muthoni wa Kirima and Wangu wa Makeri played crucial roles in the Mau Mau Uprising against British rule. They fought as guerrilla soldiers, hid and protected freedom fighters, and kept their communities strong and resilient in the face of severe repression. Njeri wa Gathoni, another key figure, was part of the resistance and became an enduring symbol of defiance and strength.

South African women were equally instrumental in resisting the system of apartheid. Albertina Sisulu, Winnie Madikizela-Mandela, and Helen Joseph were all anti-apartheid leaders, working tirelessly to dismantle the apartheid regime. Albertina Sisulu was one of the first women to hold a leadership role in the ANC and was deeply involved in organizing protests, strikes, and acts of defiance.

\*\*\*

In Africa and in the diaspora, the spread of conservative and patriarchal interpretations of Islam and Christianity brought significant shifts to women's social roles. They often imposed more strict gender norms, contributing to the marginalization of women in many Pan-African communities and often restricted them to domestic roles. The introduction of Western legal systems and education also contributed to the subjugation of women, as colonial governments largely excluded women from politics and leadership positions.

With the end of colonial rule in Africa during the mid-20th century, many countries witnessed the rise of female political leaders, scholars, and activists who contributed to national independence and social change. However, the post-colonial period also presented new challenges for African women, as many newly independent nations still faced the remnants of colonial economic systems, patriarchal structures, and political instability.

Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, the former President of Liberia, made history in 2005 as the first female head of state in Africa. Her election marked a significant achievement in African women's political empowerment. Johnson Sirleaf played a critical role in Liberia's post-war recovery, focusing on rebuilding the nation's infrastructure, promoting education, and advancing gender equality. Subsequently, in 2012, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma also made history by becoming the first woman to head the African Union Commission. It was within

this framework that the reference program known as agenda 2063 was developed, under her leadership. In 2021, Samia Suluhu Hassan became President of Tanzania, and in 2024, Namibia elected its first female President, Netumbo Nandi-Ndaitwah.

In the 21st century, the social condition of African women has evolved significantly, though numerous challenges remain. While African women continue to fight against traditional gender roles and practices, they are increasingly visible in all sectors of society. Women now serve as heads of state, activists, academics, business leaders, and artists, though they still face challenges like gender-based violence, child marriage, and unequal access to education and job opportunities.

Wangari Maathai, the Kenyan environmental and political activist, stands as one of the most iconic figures in the fight for women's rights and environmental justice in Africa. In 2004, she became the first African woman to win the Nobel Peace Prize for her contribution to sustainable development, democracy, and peace. In Nigeria, Ngozi Okonjo-Iweala has become a global icon of women's leadership in finance and development. Appointed the Director-General of the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2021, Okonjo-Iweala's success story is a testament to African women's growing presence in high-level international organizations. The entertainment industry has also seen the rise of powerful African women who have made substantial impacts globally such as Lupita Nyong'o, the Kenyan actress, or Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, the writer from Nigeria.

The 20th and 21st centuries also witnessed an extraordinary evolution of Black women in the diaspora such as Rosa Parks, Maya Angelou, Angela Davis, Toni Morrison, Oprah Winfrey or Beyoncé in the United States, Celina González and Nancy Morejón in Cuba, Lélia Gonzalez and Márcia Lúcia de Lima in Brazil, Manuela Sáenz in Ecuador, or Carmen Bohórquez in Venezuela. In the world of politics, black women are gradually making their mark, as shown by Costa Rican vice-president Espy Campbell, Colombian vice-president Francia Elena Márquez or Kamala Harris in the United States. In the West Indies, figures such as Michaëlle Jean, the Haitian woman who became Governor of Canada, Karine Jean-Pierre, the Haitian-born Martiquaise, who became Joe Biden's spokeswoman, Mia Mottley, the Prime Minister of Barbados, and Rihanna, the Barbadian singer, have become world-famous.

But these remarkable successes must not be the tree that hides the forest. In Africa and the Diaspora, women are still discriminated against in all sectors of activity, in access to education, employment and funds. In 2016, for example, a survey by France Stratégie, a French government agency, showed that, all other things being equal, the wage gap in France between a white man and a woman of African origin is 49%.

In addition, sexist and sexual violence remains at a very high level almost everywhere. In Nigeria, the #BringBackOurGirls movement gained international attention after the kidnapping of over 200 schoolgirls by the Boko Haram terrorist group in 2014. According to Unicef, over 79 million girls and women in sub-Saharan Africa were subjected to rape or sexual assault as children, and 33% African women in Africa and in the Diaspora, have been

a victim of sexual violence in their life. In Eastern and Southern Africa, 42% of women experience physical or sexual violence in their lifetime.

Beyond its human and moral impact, gender-based violence jeopardizes the well-being and productivity of individuals and communities, often across generations. It impedes women's participation in education and the labor market and is costing economies up to 4% of GDP. This is why the fight for equality between women and men is necessary for moral and philosophical reasons; but it also happens to be useful for the economic development of human communities, in Africa and elsewhere. In this sense, the economic and social development of humanity cannot take place without the economic and social development of women, and this is what this bill seeks to promote.

# **The Women's Empowerment Bill**

## **Chapter 1: General Provisions**

### **Article 1: Definitions**

For the purposes of this Bill:

- "Economic Empowerment" refers to the process of enabling women to have access to, control over, and ownership of resources, income, and decision-making power in economic affairs.
- "Social Empowerment" refers to the enhancement of women's social standing, access to education, healthcare, housing, and equal participation in societal and cultural activities.

### **Article 2: Purpose and Scope**

This Bill is designed to promote the social and economic empowerment of women in the State of the African Diaspora, eliminate barriers to gender equality, and ensure the protection of women's rights, a program implemented under the authority of the Ministry of Women's Social and Economic Development. The Ministry for Women's Social and Economic Development shall ensure that this bill is adhered to, by the staff of the Ministry and all citizens of SOAD.

### **Article 3: Jurisdiction**

The jurisdiction of this law concerns the citizens of the State of the African Diaspora, as well as the inhabitants of the smart cities that will be built by SOAD, in accordance with the agreements that will be signed with the local governments. The smart cities under the jurisdiction of SOAD shall endorse the Coalition of cities against sexism.

## **Chapter 2: Education and Capacity Building**

### **Article 4: Access to Education**

- All girls and women shall have equal access to quality education at all levels, including primary, secondary, tertiary, and vocational training.
- Special provisions shall be made to ensure that women from marginalized communities, including rural areas, have access to education.
- The State shall establish scholarships, grants, and financial support programs for women pursuing higher education and technical skills development.

### **Article 5: Gender Sensitivity Training**

- The Ministry of Education shall implement mandatory gender sensitivity training programs for teachers, educators and all personnel under its administration, to promote an inclusive and non-discriminatory educational environment.

- Schools and universities will provide support services such as counseling and mentorship programs for women pursuing non-traditional fields, including science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

### **Chapter 3: Economic Empowerment and Workforce Participation**

#### **Article 6: Access to Financial Resources**

- The State shall create the Pan-African Women’s Bank, and financial literacy workshops specifically for women, especially those in rural or underserved areas.
- Women entrepreneurs shall be supported through grants, loans, and training programs to facilitate access to capital and business development.
- Financial institutions shall be incentivized to offer favorable terms for women-led businesses and companies where each gender represents at least 40% of the workers at all levels of the company.

#### **Article 7: Workplace Equality**

- Employers shall be required to implement policies ensuring equal pay for equal work, regardless of gender.
- The State shall establish and enforce labor laws that prohibit gender-based discrimination in hiring, promotion, and remuneration.
- Special initiatives will be established to encourage women’s participation in leadership roles and non-traditional industries.
- Workplace environments shall be free of sexual harassment, with clear reporting and resolution mechanisms in place.

#### **Article 8: Women in Leadership and Decision-Making**

- The State shall adopt affirmative action policies to increase women’s representation in government positions, corporate boards, and other leadership roles.
- Women shall be encouraged to run for political office, with support through training, mentorship.

### **Chapter 4: Gender-Based Violence Prevention and Response**

#### **Article 9: Definition and Scope of Gender-Based Violence**

Gender-Based Violence (GBV) is defined as any harmful act directed at an individual based on their gender, including, but not limited to, domestic violence, sexual harassment, trafficking, femicide, and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and early/forced marriage. This Act aims to prevent GBV, protect survivors, and hold perpetrators accountable.

### **Article 10: Prevention of Gender-Based Violence**

- The State shall conduct public awareness campaigns to educate citizens on the various forms of GBV, its social and psychological impacts, and the legal consequences for perpetrators.
- Schools, workplaces, and public spaces shall implement programs to raise awareness about GBV and create environments where violence is prevented, and victims are supported.
- These programs shall also change behaviours providing skills and practical mechanisms to intervene, confront and deescalate harmful behaviours.
- Gender equality education shall be integrated into the national curriculum to help prevent GBV by addressing societal norms and stereotypes from an early age.
- The State will work with civil society, local communities, and international organizations to promote gender-sensitive behaviours and respect for women's rights across society.
- The State shall create an institutional framework to attend GBV issues, and partner with international and local organizations that have experience in this field.

### **Article 11: Legal Protection and Accountability**

- Strict laws shall be enacted to address all forms of GBV in all the places wherever SOAD's jurisdiction applies, in liaison with local authorities
- Perpetrators of GBV shall face legal consequences, with the justice system providing swift and effective prosecution of offenders.
- The State shall provide legal recourse for survivors, including restraining orders and access to free legal services.
- The justice system will prioritize GBV cases to ensure timely legal processes, and laws will include provisions to protect the confidentiality and dignity of survivors throughout legal proceedings.
- The justice system implemented by SOAD shall drive dangerous men out of their homes.
- Perpetrators shall be held accountable through mandatory acknowledgment of harm, participation in supervised rehabilitation programs, and actions aimed at making amends, without replacing criminal or civil liability.

### **Article 12: Survivor Support and Services**

Comprehensive support services will be provided to survivors of GBV, including:

- Access to emergency shelters and safe houses.
- Free legal aid and counseling services.
- Psychological support and trauma-informed care, including long-term mental health services.

- Vocational training and economic support to help survivors regain independence and reintegrate into society.
- Support for children who are victims or witnesses of GBV, including counseling and child protection services.
- Specialized training for healthcare providers will ensure that survivors of GBV receive gender-sensitive, trauma-informed care, including immediate treatment for injuries, psychological support, and sexual health services.

### **Article 13: Strengthening Institutional Response**

- Law enforcement agencies shall be trained to handle GBV cases with sensitivity, ensuring that officers respond appropriately, treat survivors with dignity, and collect evidence effectively.
- The State shall establish dedicated units within police forces and courts to handle GBV cases, ensuring a victim-centered approach.
- A national database will be created to monitor GBV cases, track trends, and ensure accountability in law enforcement and judicial processes.

## **Chapter 5: Legal Rights and Protection**

### **Article 14: Equal Rights Legislation**

- Women shall be granted full legal rights to own property, sign contracts, and participate in financial and legal transactions without the need for male consent.
- Discriminatory practices, in all sectors, including forced marriage, child marriage, and inheritance discrimination, shall be prohibited.
- The State shall take proactive steps to eliminate all forms of gender-based discrimination in legal systems, including inheritance, custody, and divorce proceedings.

### **Article 15: Protection of Women's Rights**

- A National Commission on Women's Rights shall be established to monitor the implementation of this Act, investigate complaints, and ensure accountability for violations of women's rights.
- Special programs shall be designed to ensure that women who face intersectional discrimination (e.g., due to race, class, disability) receive appropriate support.
- Women shall have access to family planning and contraception services.
- A standard number of hygienic towels will be made available to women free of charge each month.
- SOAD considers women's rights as a natural law and our policy includes protecting women against adverse cultural and or religious ideologies.
- Future legislation will introduce equal parental leave for fathers and mothers.

## **Chapter 6: Monitoring and Evaluation**

### **Article 16: Data Collection and Research**

- The State shall collect disaggregated data on women's social and economic status, including education, health, employment, and political participation, to guide policy decisions and measure progress.
- Research shall be conducted to identify and address emerging issues facing women, including the impact of new technologies, migration, and global economic trends.

### **Article 17 : Monitoring and Evaluation**

- A National Gender-Based Violence Monitoring and Evaluation Agency will be established to track progress in preventing GBV, report on incidents, and evaluate the effectiveness of GBV-related programs. This Agency shall be under the authority of the Ministry in charge of Women's Social and Economic Development.
- The Agency will publish annual reports on the status of GBV in the State, providing data on prevalence, legal proceedings, and victim support, and making recommendations for future actions.
- International human rights organizations, civil society groups, and community leaders will be engaged in monitoring and ensuring the implementation of GBV policies.

### **Article 18: Annual Reports**

- The Ministry of Women's Social and Economic Development shall produce annual reports on the implementation of this Act, outlining progress, challenges, and future objectives.
- These reports shall be made publicly available and subject to review by civil society organizations and international stakeholders.

\*\*\*\*