CELEBRATING 45 YEARS OF THE AFRICAN CHARTER (1981–2026): DEFENDING OUR RIGHTS, REJECTING REGRESSIVE BACKLASH

As civil society across Africa marks 45 years since the adoption of our foundational African Charter, we must stand united against attempts to tear down the rights and protections won by generations of African advocates.

What is the 'Draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values' (FSV)?

The Draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values was developed through conferences in Uganda and Ghana (2023–2026). Promoted as a tool to protect "African tradition and culture", its actual provisions restrict basic human rights, ban essential health education, ignore real African family structures, and instruct governments to withdraw from established African human rights treaties

MYTHS	FACTS
The Draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values is Pan-African; it is by Africans for Africans	The text was written and funded by far-right groups from the US and Europe. The Netherlands-based Christian Council International (CCI) publicly claims authorship of the text, with US-based Family Watch International and Poland's Ordo Iuris serving as key strategists and convenors.
African values are under attack from foreign ideologies, and this charter defends us	The draft charter itself imports Western conservative political agendas into African law. Articles 10(9) and 24 of the charter explicitly command African states to endorse the Geneva Consensus Declaration: a political document drafted directly by the United States government.
The Draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values protects African families and traditions	The draft charter imposes a narrow colonial concept of family. African kinship systems carried plural, extended, and relational concepts of family long before colonial legal codes existed. What the draft charter pushes as "tradition" is colonial residue and patriarchal control that erases grandmothers raising orphans, single parents, widows, and extended family networks, leaving them without legal protection, social aid, or inheritance rights. A charter that fails to recognise these families is not protecting them; it is abandoning them.
The Draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values will achieve African sovereignty	The draft charter distorts sovereignty from a principle of liberation into a tool of prohibition. Genuine sovereignty belongs to African peoples, not to elites shield-ing themselves from human rights oversight.
This is the first charter that is informed by African values, religions and cultures	Africa has built a world-class human rights system over the last 45 years. The African Charter (adopted in 1981), the Maputo Protocol, and the African Chil-dren's Charter were created by Africans for Africans to protect human dignity, equality, and positive cultural heritage.
The Draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values is good for African women and girls	It strips away women's autonomy and child protections. It removes access to lifesaving reproductive healthcare, bans body-safety/health education in schools, promotes vaccine hesitancy (including against HPV/cervical cancer), and sub-jects children's healthcare and safety to absolute parental veto. No sovereignty is genuine where bodily autonomy and gender equality are denied.
It's not perfect, but it's good overall	It is structurally unreformable and fundamentally dangerous. The draft charter retains the formal language of human rights only to systematically strip those rights of legal substance, subvert regional courts, and execute a legal coup against continental law.
If it's not adopted, it's not a threat	The threat is already at our doorstep. Even if it is not adopted, it is already influ-encing regional human rights mechanisms and national legislation. For example, the Pan African Parliament's draft Model Law on Family Protection cites the Draft FSV Charter and adopts its language; similarly, national bills are already adopting and replicating its harmful 'family values' narratives and backsliding of rights.

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If the Draft African Charter on Family, Sovereignty and Values is adopted by heads of state:

- **Adopting the draft charter would dismantle Africa's human rights architecture by directing member states to reject rulings from the African Court and Commission, replacing judicial oversight with an ideologically screened 'AU Committee on Family, Sovereignty, and Values'.**
- **This parallel system would isolate African citizens from regional protection mechanisms and shield state authorities from accountability for human rights violations.**

What Adoption Would Mean for Your CSO and Community:

If this draft charter is adopted or passed into national law, it will dismantle regional human rights protections and severely impact civil society:

1

Shrinking Civic Space & Criminalisation: Governments will use the charter's vague "public morality" and "sovereignty" rules to pass restrictive NGO laws, limit funding, criminalise rights advocacy, and label CSOs as "foreign agents". By branding human rights CSOs as 'foreign agents', the draft charter seeks to silence popular oversight. Independent civil society and pro-democracy movements are not foreign threats—they are African sovereignty and self-determination in action.

2

Loss of Hard-Won Protections: Decades of community victories won by African CSOs, such as legal bans on child marriage, protections against female genital mutilation (FGM), widow inheritance protection, and adolescent health access, will be legally rolled back.

3

No Access to Justice: Citizens and CSOs will be blocked from appealing to African regional courts when national governments violate human rights.

The better option

Rather than adopting a regressive, foreign-driven instrument, African states must champion universal ratification of the Maputo Protocol without reservations, along with the lifting of existing reservations and claw-back clauses. Fully funding and enforcing our existing continental agreements, and meeting domestic commitments like allocating 15% of national budgets to healthcare under the Abuja Declaration, guarantees health, equality, and dignity for all Africans through frameworks rooted in genuine African jurisprudence.

Call to Action

We cannot allow the dismantling of the African human rights framework and its mechanisms just as we celebrate 45 years of the African Charter. We call on CSOs across the continent to expose this foreign-backed draft, mobilize local communities, and demand that our governments uphold genuine African sovereignty through the Maputo Protocol.

Scan this QR code or visit link below for more info.
https://soawr.org/resources_posts/resistance-hub/

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