



# PRESS RELEASE

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## SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN THE AFRICAN UNION (AU)

The [Solidarity for African Women's Rights](#) is a coalition of over 70 civil society organizations working across 33 countries. SOAWR works to ensure that the rights of girls and women as articulated in the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa ("the Maputo Protocol") are prioritized by policymakers on the African continent.

On the heels of celebrating two decades of promoting and protecting the rights of women and girls in Africa, we are dismayed to learn of the alleged sexual harassment of the Bilingual Secretary of the Pan-African Parliament (PAP) at the hands of the former President of the PAP, and the subsequent failure of the Clerk of the PAP to investigate her complaints and hold the responsible party accountable. Not only did she suffer the injustice of the harassment but no actions were taken to protect her from the risk of further harassment. This failure took place despite the AU Harassment Policy (AUC/AD/2016/06), which expressly prohibits "any actions or behaviors that may reasonably be seen as harassment or retaliation related to such harassment by or against any staff member."

SOAWR notes similar [allegations of harassment against women](#) within the African Union Commission in 2018. The High Level Committee reviewing the matter and recommended that the AUC develop a sexual harassment policy, yet 6 years later and despite having a policy in place we have found ourselves in the same place.

We strongly condemn the harassment, of any form, of women who seek not only to empower themselves economically through their work, but also to provide for their families. We further echo the sentiments of the CEDAW

Committee in its [General Recommendation No. 19](#) where it notes that sexual harassment inhibits equality within the workplace. We emphasize the need to ensure that all work places are safe for women and that sexual harassment is combatted and punished as enumerated in Article 13 (c) of the Maputo Protocol.

We call on the African Union Commission to not only put in place policy and regulations on workplace harassment, but to ensure that the same are properly implemented and that all personnel are held accountable where there are breaches. We assert that the African Union should develop a grievance system within itself and its other organs to ensure that harassment and especially sexual harassment is investigated and punished, and that those who report complaints of harassment are protected from reprisals and backlash.

We welcome the [Statement](#) by the Special Rapporteur on the Rights of Women in Africa and echo her call for investigations and an end to apathy to sexual harassment claims, and urge the African Union Commission to take decisive and firm action on this matter, and to hold all relevant persons accountable for the harassment of the Bilingual Secretary of PAP, as well as those who failed to believe and investigate her complaints.

Furthermore, we call on the African Union Commission Chairperson to release and circulate the full report of the 2018 High Level Committee that investigated sexual harassment within the institutions of the African Union.

### **- *The SOAWR Coalition***

A Coalition of over 70 organizations working on women's rights in 33 African countries. SOAWR was formed with the principal objective of advocating for the ratification, domestication, and implementation of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (the Maputo Protocol), adopted 21 years ago.