

CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATIONS' STATEMENT
DURING THE COMMEMORATION OF THE INTERNATIONAL SAFE ABORTION
DAY (ISAD)
28TH SEPTEMBER, 2024

On this International Safe Abortion Day 2024, we, the undersigned organizations, committed to advancing the Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) of women and adolescent girls across Africa, including in Nigeria, Zambia, Malawi, Rwanda, Tanzania, Uganda, and Kenya, collectively reaffirm our commitment to promotion and protection of abortion rights. **WE UNITE IN #ABORTIONSOLIDARITY** to amplify our voices and re-energize our efforts towards the realization of our shared objective of advocating for the removal of restrictive laws and policies and the promotion of access to safe abortion care as an essential reproductive health service.

We recognize the strides made by African governments towards advancing sexual and reproductive rights of women and girls, evidenced by the ratification of regional and international instruments such as the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

While appreciating that today, in many African states, abortion is legally permitted albeit under varying and often restrictive circumstances, we express concern that the legal frameworks for abortion in several countries, including Nigeria, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Kenya, continue to criminalize abortion under most circumstances. The interpretation and implementation of restrictive abortion laws in a varied and subjective manner, has resulted in reluctance by healthcare providers to perform safe abortions, even in situations where it is permitted, due to fear of legal repercussions or fear of societal reprimand.

In addition, women and adolescent girls face substantial barriers to access, including the requirement for third-party authorizations in Kenya, Rwanda, and Zambia, cadre restrictions on authorized healthcare providers in Rwanda and Zambia, and the arbitrary withdrawal of essential standards and guidelines for healthcare providers in Nigeria, Uganda and Kenya. These barriers, compounded by rigid cultural and religious-based resistance to abortion, growing anti-rights, anti-gender movements, widespread misinformation, disinformation, and stigma, continue to make safe abortion care inaccessible to many women and girls in all their diversities.

In a continent with the highest rate of abortion-related deaths in the world at 185 maternal deaths per 100,000 abortions, where more than 77% of abortions are estimated to be unsafe, and approximately 6.2 million unsafe abortions occur annually (Gutmacher, 2020), the devastating impact on women and adolescent girls, including severe health complications and preventable death is undeniable.

In solidarity with the African women and adolescent girls in all their diversities, we join voices to affirm that safe abortion care is a fundamental human right that must be protected and upheld. We further call on governments to urgently:

1. Revise their existing criminal and other laws regulating abortion to comply with the commitments outlined under the Maputo Protocol so as to ensure broader access to safe abortion services without any legal or administrative barriers.
2. Adopt, disseminate and implement comprehensive, evidence-based guidelines that support healthcare providers in delivering safe abortion and post-abortion care. Efforts should also be made to remove any legal or policy restrictions that impede healthcare providers' ability to provide safe abortion and post-abortion care services.
3. Provide accurate and non-judgmental information on SRHR including access to safe abortion care for all women and adolescent girls in all their diversities.
4. Undertake comprehensive public awareness and education initiatives aimed at addressing and dismantling the stigma surrounding abortion, and explicitly addressing the pervasive misinformation and stigma surrounding this critical reproductive health service.
5. Bolster healthcare infrastructure and capacity to ensure the provision of comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services, including safe abortion and post-abortion care, particularly in underserved and rural communities.
6. Lend full and sustained support to the provision of safe abortion services to ensure that they become accessible, available, affordable and of quality for all women and adolescent girls in all their diversities.

Endorsed by:

