

11<sup>th</sup> October 2018

# International Day of the Girl Child

*With Her: A Skilled Girl Force*

## Message IPPF Africa Region

This marks the sixth year of observing the 'International Day of the Girl Child.' Over the past few years, there has been increased global advocacy on promotion of basic human rights for girls; rights to access education, health and gender equality. In retrospect, some governments have put in place policies and instruments that advance these rights; others are still struggling with implementation.

"*With Her: A Skilled Girl Force*" is the guiding theme for this years' International Day of the Girl Child. In Africa, girls face adversities that hinder their education, training and entry into the workforce. They have less access to information, communication technology and resources, such as the Internet where the global gender gap is growing.

Investing in girls' education is one of the best ways for Africa to reap its demographic dividend. The value of educating a girl yields returns for the women and girls; better health, employment, voice and autonomy. But the most important effect of educating a girl reside in the inter-generational impact of such an investment, namely on their families' health and wellbeing and their own children's education.

While, The Africa Population and Development Index Report, (APDI, 2018) shows improved enrolment of girls into primary schools, the State of the African Women (SoAW) Report suggests strengthened advocacy efforts to free girls from gender-based violence (GBV) and harmful traditional practices, depravities that threaten transition rates for girls all through secondary to tertiary schools; since most of them drop out of school.

This report was launched in July 2018 after the State of the African Woman Campaign (SoAWC) implementing partners conducted in-depth analysis of the situation of girls and women in Africa. The report also calls for increased advocacy on promotion of their sexual and reproductive health and rights to reduce cases of teenage pregnancy and HIV and AIDS.

According to SoAW Report, Africa knows the highest rates of child marriage in the world. 1 in 4 women and girls in Sub-Saharan Africa is married before age of 18. Countries with high levels of child marriage also have high rates of maternal deaths and high adolescent births rates. Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) is still

concentrated in 27 countries from the horn of Africa to the Atlantic coast. If current trends continue, by 2050 Africa will become the region with the largest number of child marriages in the world.

The Human Rights Declaration has clear provisions that protect girls from early marriage and harmful traditional practices. Despite the availability of such powerful instruments, millions of girls still flee from homes to escape from FGM and forced marriages in pursuit of education.

A quarter of young people, most of them girls, are neither employed nor getting an education or training. This years' theme is a call to action for all governments and civils society organizations to guard the rights of girls that may otherwise hinder them from attaining skills and highest education qualifications possible, relevant for the current job market.

Girls in Africa are challenging the status quo, redefining girlhood and doing the best against the odds. Despite the challenges that they endure, they still persist; they still succeed! Girls are constantly innovating technology to solve global challenges. For instance, five Kenyan girls recently (2017) developed an application (the i-cut) that aims to end FGM. We applaud them!

This is a classic example of how education and empowerment for women and girls can spur development and spin countries towards realizing their various development agendas including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the AU Agenda 63.

Our on-going #RightByHer campaign – that was kicked off after the SoAW Report launch - advocates for "her right to live free from violence and harm, and her right to health, education and contraception" the campaign further aims to strengthen Civil Society's contribution to implementation of the African commitments on women and girls' right in sexual and reproductive health and rights.

Today, we renew our commitment to protect the rights of women and girls across Africa

Happy International Day of the Girl Child!