Communiqué

Public Reading and Strategy Consultation on the AU Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (CEVAWG)

From 15 to 17 September 2025, lawyers, scholars, civil society organisations, human rights defenders and feminist activists convened for a Public Reading and Strategy Consultation on the African Union Convention on Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (CEVAWG). The meeting was co-convened by the Initiative for Strategic Litigation in Africa (ISLA), Akina Mama wa Afrika (AMwA), and Fòs Feminista, who brought together diverse voices from across the continent to interrogate the Convention, assess its progress/advancements, gaps or challenges and strategise on the way forward.

Background

The African Union adopted CEVAWG in February 2025 during the 38th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The Convention has been welcomed as a milestone in advancing women's rights on the continent. It explicitly recognises various manifestations of violence, including violence in cyberspace and femicide, it embraces the role of men and boys in ending VAWG, and calls for coordinated state responses across health, social welfare, and justice sectors.

However, alongside these advancements, there are critical gaps, in process and substance, that may limit the Convention's effectiveness in practice and hinder its ability to fulfil its objectives.

Key Concerns Raised

During the three days, participants undertook an article-by-article and line-by-line analysis of the Convention, and raised several concerns about both the process and the substance of the text. With regard to process, the Convention was only made publicly available three months after its adoption. In addition, contrary to treaty-making norms, the Convention was opened for ratification before it was made publicly available and subjected to edits post-adoption without undergoing a proper process of renegotiation. These concerns raise questions of legality, transparency and accountability. There were no reports documenting the findings of public consultations, and the extent of engagement with women's rights and grassroots organisations was limited, with many national actors only learning of the Convention after its adoption.

In terms of substantive weaknesses, participants noted that although the Convention identifies forms such as cyberviolence and femicide, these are framed in narrow and limited terms. More broadly, the Convention is not anchored in a human rights-based approach or a clear gender analysis, which weakens its ability to address discrimination and the structural inequalities that fuel violence. The analysis of its textual context as well as the silences and what is missing revealed that the Convention is not responsive to the context of how women and girls experience gender based violence anchored in contextual. Important issues such as progressive definitions of consent, and protections against harmful practices like female genital mutilation (FGM) are omitted, despite their recognition in existing AU standards such as the Maputo Protocol and African Commission Guidelines. The Convention was found inconsistent with treaty law in terms of structure, form and content, and inconsistent with the Maputo Protocol primarily because it fails to establish normative standards and to establish clear legal entitlements that create state obligations. In addition, the Convention has inconsistencies with the Maputo Protocol in the process of development– while the Maputo Protocol was developed following a bottom up approach with robust engagement from stakeholders, CEVAWG was developed through a top-down approach led by the office of the AU Special Envoy for Peace and Security with limited engagement and consultations in the drafting process.

Concerns were also raised regarding implementation and accountability gaps. The Convention designates the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) as the monitoring body under Article 14. While this may appear procedurally consistent, it raises concerns given the Commission's persistent institutional weaknesses, its restrictive interpretation of Article 59(1) of the African Charter, and its poor record of referring cases to the African Court. By failing to provide for an independent or specialised monitoring mechanism, the Convention risks further entrenching existing gaps in access to justice within the African human rights system.

Finally, participants flagged the risk of regression. Certain framings in the text, such as appeals to "African values" and "family", were seen as vulnerable to misuse by anti-rights actors to justify derogations from human rights protections. The Convention also does not adequately reflect the diversity of African families, nor does it acknowledge that family spaces can themselves be sites of violence.

Outcomes of the Consultation

In light of these concerns, participants resolved that CEVAWG must undergo revisions before ratification. They called for the ratification process to be paused so that the treaty can be strengthened, aligned with existing African Union and international standards, and made fully responsive to the lived realities of African women and girls. Participants also committed to mobilising feminist networks and civil society to ensure advocacy around CEVAWG reinforces, rather than weakens, the continental human rights framework, and to produce knowledge products to support grassroots and policy engagement.

Participants also drafted a collective statement calling for a pause in the ratification process to ensure that CEVAWG is truly fit for purpose. The statement further launched the #PauseforPurpose campaign. To access the full statement and to join the campaign advancing this cause, visit
www.aucevawg.org

Conclusion

The Public Reading and Strategy Consultation on CEVAWG reaffirmed that civil society organisations remain central to shaping an African human rights framework that truly serves women and girls. CEVAWG, in its current form, is a significant but incomplete step. To achieve its intended purpose, it must be strengthened through inclusive consultation, alignment with existing African Union regional normative standards, international standards and the establishment of effective monitoring and accountability mechanisms.

Participants therefore call on African Union Member States, AU organs, and all stakeholders to embrace the proposals for reform before ratification, ensuring that the Convention becomes not only a symbolic instrument but a living framework that protects, empowers, and delivers justice for all women and girls in Africa.