

Peace, Development, and Justice Cannot be Achieved Without Women's Full and Equal Participation

The Catholic Task Force on Africa International Women's Day 2025 Statement

On this International Women's Day, the Catholic Task Force on Africa stands in solidarity with women and girls across the African continent and beyond — particularly those living under the shadows of conflict, exploitation, and systemic injustice. As a network of Catholic organizations based in Washington, DC, with ministries across Africa, we amplify the voices of women whose daily struggles and triumphs continue to shape the destiny of their communities and nations.

Women and girls in Africa are the backbone of families, the silent engines of economies, and the unwavering keepers of community life. Yet, their dignity and rights are consistently undermined by violence, discrimination, and exclusion. From the conflict zones of Sudan, South Sudan, and the Democratic Republic of Congo, to urban streets and rural villages across the continent, women bear the heaviest burdens of war, poverty, and abuse — while remaining the most powerful agents of resilience and hope.

In Sudan and South Sudan, where civil war and political instability have displaced millions, women and girls suffer the unspeakable horrors of sexual violence used as a weapon of war. Their voices cry out not only for urgent humanitarian assistance but for peace, security, and the right to rebuild their lives with dignity. We echo their call: *"We are tired of death and loss... We want peace and security. We want our children not to grow up hearing the sound of gunfire every day."* Women must not only be seen as victims — they must be recognized as decision-makers, negotiators, and leaders in all peacebuilding efforts.

Across the continent, entrenched gender power imbalances deny women access to education, financial resources, and leadership opportunities. Millions of women remain trapped in cycles of poverty, forced into child marriage, exploited as domestic workers, or subjected to sexual abuse in workplaces and schools. The normalization of gender-based violence, the silence surrounding sexual exploitation, and the impunity enjoyed by perpetrators are moral and societal failures that must no longer be tolerated.

We denounce the pervasive exploitation of women in Africa's labor markets — where too often women are treated not as colleagues, but as objects, coerced into sexual submission to secure jobs or academic advancement. We break the silence on the abuse of female students by teachers and professors, which robs young women of their future before it even begins. This culture of impunity must end.

Yet, despite these injustices, African women continue to rise — as peacebuilders, entrepreneurs, educators, and community leaders. Women-led civil society organizations are transforming

communities through education, microfinance, and advocacy. Women entrepreneurs are creating jobs and building resilience out of necessity. Their courage and creativity must be met with investment, protection, and equal opportunities.

We specifically demand an immediate end to the destabilization of the Democratic Republic of Congo by external forces. The Rwandan and Ugandan governments must stop their involvement in the conflict, which has perpetuated decades of suffering for Congolese women and girls. We further call on all companies sourcing minerals from conflict zones to adopt ethical business practices prioritizing the dignity of women and girls over profit.

To the women and girls of Africa — from the refugee camps of Sudan to the classrooms of Kenya, from the marketplaces of Ghana to the war-ravaged villages of Congo — we see you, we hear you, and we stand with you. Your struggle is our struggle. Your dignity is non-negotiable.

Call to Action

On this International Women's Day, we call on governments, religious institutions, civil society, and the international community to:

- Ensure women's full and equal participation in decision-making
- Establish and enforce laws protecting women from sexual exploitation in schools, workplaces, and communities
- Invest in women's education and economic empowerment programs
- Accompany women in seeking justice when their rights have been violated
- Hold corporations accountable for profiting from conflict minerals that fuel violence against women in conflict zones.

The future of Africa depends on women and girls living free from fear, exploitation, and violence. The time for change is not tomorrow — it is NOW.

Catholic Task Force on Africa

Washington, DC