

STATEMENT

UPR Pre-session on Namibia

Geneva, 25-26th March 2021

Delivered by: Nadia April, Women's Leadership Centre, Namibia

Thank you for the opportunity to provide a statement to this pre session.

My Name is Nadia April, representing the Women's Leadership Centre, a Namibian feminist organization that facilitates the voice, visibility and leadership of Namibian women from some of the most marginalized, excluded and discriminated groups of society.

Today I focus on two issues of concern: (1) Violence against women and girls; (2) The protection of the rights of indigenous people.

1 Violence against women and girls

In the last UPR cycle Namibia received and supported 23 recommendations regarding gender based violence and discrimination against women.

However, violence against women and girls has continued to escalate in Namibia, leading to anti-violence protests in October 2020 by the #ShutItAllDown Movement, including the call for a state of emergency with regard to femicide in Namibia.

While the state responded with a slate of measures to be taken, these are devoid of timelines, deadlines, and offices responsible for their implementation, thus making it near impossible to hold government accountable to them.

Furthermore, harmful cultural practices targeting adolescent girls persist in many diverse communities in Namibia, as documented in the recently published National Formative Study on Child Marriage. These initiation practices entrench gender stereotypes and normalize and justify violence against women and girls in the name of culture, preparing girls for subservience to men in marriage.

We therefore recommend that the state

- Adopts a detailed national budget allocation with timelines and sectorial responsibilities for its response to the escalating violence against women and girls
- Develops a National Campaign targeting traditional leaders, community leaders and religious leaders to abolish all harmful cultural practices that violate the rights of girls and women.

2. The protection of the rights of indigenous people

The Women's Leadership Centre is supporting indigenous San women and girls in several communities across Namibia, and we have observed the pervasive racial and ethnic stereotyping that leads to the ongoing discrimination and abuse of the San. Many San women have complained about negligence, discrimination and abuse by staff in health services, and in particular in maternity wards, stating that they would rather die at home in childbirth than experience abuse at the hands of hospital staff. A serious scabies outbreak in 2020 in San communities in Kavango East Region was only attended to after a letter of complaint to the Ministry of Health and critical media coverage. The lack of access to water was one of the aggravating circumstances for the spread of the disease.

A new issue of concern is the ongoing drilling in search of oil in the Okavango Delta by a Canadian mining company with expertise in fracking. The drilling is currently taking place on land historically occupied by indigenous San peoples. This will have major environmental and social consequences. Regarding the additional dangers posed for women, research in Canada has shown a direct correlation between Man camps (temporary housing facilities constructed for predominantly male workers) and violence against indigenous women including rape, murder, sex trafficking and disappearance, as well as an increase in STIs including HIV.

We therefore recommend that the state

- Ensure the provision of quality health care and supporting programmes that promote Indigenous social well-being, with participation from Indigenous people themselves.
- Stop the process of drilling and potentially fracking of the Okavango Delta to protect indigenous lands and environments as well as the rights of San girls and women
- Urgently Adopt the White Paper on Indigenous Rights, and implement it through meaningful consultation with indigenous people in Namibia.

