

CEDAW | Cote d'Ivoire must take more action to protect women human rights defenders

19.08.2019

The Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) held its seventy-third session from 1 to 19 July 2019 in Geneva. CEDAW considered the fourth periodic report of Côte d'Ivoire on the elimination of discrimination against women. During this session, serious concerns about the protection of women human rights defenders were expressed.



During the session, civil society organisations gave an overview of the situation of the WHRDs in the country. "WHRDs that intervene on the issues of excision, early marriage or any other issue with targets grass roots communities are stigmatised and ostracised by community leaders, religious groups, families and communities who consider their work to be endangering their religion, honour or culture" as stated in [the report](#) of the Ivorian Coalition of Human Rights Defenders (ICHRD/CIDDH).

For Mrs Marthe Coulibaly, Coordinator of ICHRD, "as women activists, we fight for the defence of women's rights. CEDAW is an effective mechanism that we must use to improve the rights of women in our countries!"

The Committee's experts welcomed recent legislative and policy measures adopted to promote women's rights. In particular [law no. 2016-886 of 8 November 2016 establishing the Constitution of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire](#) which promotes and protects women's rights through its articles 4, 36 and 37 prohibiting discrimination and promoting equality of women and men in political, public life and in the labour market. Cote d'Ivoire also adopted [law no. 2014-388 of 20 June 2014 on the promotion and protection of human rights defenders](#), including women human rights defenders, through its article 9 and [Decree No. 2017-121](#) on its application. Finally, the government also adopted the [Interministerial Circular No. 016/MJ/MEMIS/MPRD of 4 August 2016 and Circular No. 005 of 18 March 2014](#) of the Minister of Justice and Human Rights related to the reporting of cases of gender-based violence.

However, in its report, the Committee also noted that women human rights defenders, in particular those protecting the environment and combatting female genital mutilation and child marriage, are often subjected to intimidation, harassment and threats.

Finally, the Committee addressed two recommendations to the State. [The Committee](#) calls upon the State party to:

- Adopt and implement effective measures to protect women human rights defenders, in particular those advocating against female genital mutilation, child marriage and environmental depletion; and
- Ensure the effective implementation of article 9 of Law No. 2014-388, including by establishing an independent reporting and follow-up mechanism for violations of the law.

Thus, it reminded the State's obligation to 'take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in the political and public life of the country' as mentioned in art 1 of CEDAW.

In addition, in 2016, ISHR conducted an analysis on article 9 of the law and its implementation which provides that "every woman human rights defender is protected against any kind of threat, violence or any form of discrimination related to her status as a woman defender of human rights, in accordance with national and international legal instruments the protection of women."

In her concluding remarks, Ms Hilary GBEDEMAH, Committee Chairperson, commended Côte d'Ivoire for its efforts and urged it to pay particular attention to the Committee's [concluding observations](#) identified for immediate follow up.

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