

## ACCRA DECLARATION

### Advancing Human Rights for Women and Girls

#### A Key to Peace and Progress

9 DECEMBER 2015

The Carter Center, in collaboration with the Office of the National Chief Imam of Ghana and regional civil society organizations, convened the West Africa Human Rights Defenders Forum entitled, “Mobilizing Action for Women and Girls,” from 7-9 December 2015.

Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter has asserted that universal love and equal dignity for all are at the heart of all major religions, and he has urged people of faith in every part of the world to reassert this essential truth through their words and with their deeds. In response, over sixty scholars, activists, religious leaders, donors and members of the media came together in agreement that the oppression and abuse of women and girls are serious impediments to sustainable development and human security, contributing to the suffering of families and communities. Furthermore, participants recognized that these harmful acts are contrary to the teachings of the region’s major faiths. Participants agreed to produce this declaration addressing the need for diverse segments of society to work together in honest and innovative ways to ensure respect for the human rights of women and girls. This declaration therefore emphasizes fundamental principles for and commitments to the social, economic, and political rights of women and girls, including the right to peace.

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As the scourge of militarism, war and violence challenges all nations and peoples, we call on religious, civic and political leaders to examine underlying causes of conflict and to dedicate their efforts to promoting comprehensive and effective remedies. Women and girls face the most severe consequences of war and violence, as well as conflict in the home. However, women demonstrate leadership that is far too frequently ignored, and their voices are not sufficiently heard in the corridors of power where policies that affect them are debated and decided.

#### **The Girl Child**

As in many other regions of the world, the girl child in West Africa faces inequality in many life opportunities, ranging from less access to education to the threat of early or forced marriage. Over 700 million women alive today were married as children.<sup>1</sup> The trends show that the practice may increase significantly in coming decades unless corrective steps are taken. The signatories of this declaration agree that the investment in girls must come not only from the government, but from our own communities. It is the responsibility of all to ensure that girls are able to access and stay in school and live safe and healthy lives, vested with power and influence in our society.

#### **Women in Leadership**

The exclusion of women from decision-making spaces allows for the perpetuation of injustice towards them and deprives society of their vital contributions to problem solving. Most nations have very few women in political office or in positions of religious authority. Since 1 in 3 women will face

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.girlsnotbrides.org/where-does-it-happen/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>

sexual violence in her lifetime,<sup>2</sup> her voice and involvement are crucial in making and enforcing laws necessary to end impunity for this fundamental violation of human rights. Empowering women to contribute on social, political, and economic matters, helps families and communities do better. Our communities and families must create environments for women to participate actively in all realms of life, including the political, religious, business, and cultural.

### **Gender, Faith, and Conflict**

As global counterterrorism operations escalate, security policies focus on short-term, militaristic approaches. While military and police action is necessary at times to protect communities from violence and aggression, effective and sustainable solutions require long-term, community-based approaches built on dialogue, inclusivity and respect for humanity. The signatories of this declaration agree that decision-making that is inclusive of women results in more effective security policies. Women are uniquely capable of engaging disputing parties in collaboration with key stakeholders, media and religious leaders to confront issues that typically go unaddressed in peace talks such as the rebuilding of schools, psychological rehabilitation, and food security. Women are well-placed to foster social peace and cohesion in a manner that can prevent, resolve and recover from conflict.

### **Our Commitment**

Community and religious leaders have the responsibility to act to help eliminate violence and discrimination against women and girls and ensure their inclusion in decision-making.

To advance the above, we, the undersigned, wholeheartedly commit to:

1. The inalienable human rights of women and men.
2. Demonstrate this commitment with our own words and deeds in our homes, in our work and in public.
3. Engage and sensitize our communities, religious and traditional leaders, scholars and researchers, the media, our governments, and our families on the rights of women and girls.
4. Encourage and support the protection of women and girls in our communities against injustices perpetrated under the guise of faith, culture or tradition.
5. Exert every effort to prevent violent conflict and extremism through community-based dialogue that fully integrates women as vital actors.
6. Encourage and support the promotion of greater women's involvement in decision making in the home, in communal and national discourse, in consultations and efforts to find solutions to conflicts
7. Encourage and support girls' equal and consistent access to a quality education.
8. Devote significant attention to educating boys and young men about equality and inclusion.
9. Work to address issues that impact women and girls in a holistic manner.
10. Convene and participate in regular forums or other ongoing dialogue with diverse members of society to review achievements and new areas for cooperation in the common effort to protect and elevate women and girls.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/ending-violence-against-women/facts-and-figures>