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**THE NIAMEY DECLARATION OF ECOWAS FIRST LADIES: CALL TO END CHILD MARRIAGE AND PROMOTE THE EDUCATION AND EMPOWERMENT OF GIRLS**

**We, the First Ladies of ECOWAS Member States,**

* **Meeting in Niamey, Republic of Niger, on 7 July 2019 on the margins of the 33rd Conference of Heads of State and Government of the African Union;**
* **Considering that West Africa is experiencing rapid demographic changes which have a significant impact on migration patterns, child protection, as well as the ability to provide quality governance for children and the entire population;**
* **Considering the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals on universal access to quality education, gender equality, empowerment of all women and girls, to leave no one behind, and the elimination of all harmful practices, such as child marriage, female genital mutilation and sexual- and gender-based violence;**
* **Considering Agenda 2063 and the African Union Roadmap on school enrolment and retention among girls in a protective environment and the fight against child marriage ;**
* **Considering the Declaration of the Heads of State and Government of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in Abuja on 29th June 2019 on the fight against child marriage;**
* **Considering the 2019 – 2030 ECOWAS roadmap on the prevention and response to child marriage;**

* **Considering the main obstacles to school enrolment and retention among girls in the ECOWAS region;**
* **Considering that all the efforts made by our governments are hampered by the strong demographic growth which is a major obstacle to capturing the Demographic Dividend;**
* **Convinced** that the equal participation of men and women in all spheres of economic, political and public life is essential to democracy and sustainable development;
* **Noting** that child marriage particularly affects girls with little or no education;
* **Conscious** that child marriage limits the autonomy and involvement of girls in decision-making concerning them;
* **Reiterate our** commitment to cultural diversity and reaffirm that it cannot be an obstacle to the full enjoyment of the rights, values, norms and principles enshrined in legal instruments relating to the rights of girls and women;
* **Recall** that child marriage is both a cause and a consequence of the girls’ leaving school;
* **Reaffirm** that the phenomena of child marriage, out-of-school children and school drop-outs, are violations of child rights.

We are firmly committed to supporting all local, national and regional initiatives to end child marriage, promote girls’ education and empower women and girls, the guarantee for harmonious and inclusive development.

**Hereby call on**

* **The African Union and Regional Organisations, including ECOWAS**, to ensure the effective implementation of the "End Child Marriage" campaign launched in Addis Ababa in 2015, particularly the adoption, efficient execution and monitoring of national strategies and action plans to end child marriage;
* **Member States** to initiate the legislative, institutional and budgetary reforms necessary for the implementation of the ECOWAS child protection policy, access and retention of girls in school and the Roadmap on Prevention and Response to Child Marriage adopted in Abuja in June 2019;
* **Parents, families and communities** to fully play their role in ensuring sustainable and equitable education for girls and boys alike;
* **Traditional leaders and religious leaders** to become more involved in raising awareness and take concrete steps to bring about behavioural and social change in favour of girls' education and the fight against child marriage;
* **Civil society organisations** to strengthen their advocacy activities on the protection of child rights, particularly the right to education and the fight against child marriage;
* **Women and young people** to be agents of change concerning girls’ education, women’s empowerment and the fight against child marriage;
* **Technical and Financial** **partners** to support the implementation of national strategies and plans including accelerated resource mobilisation.

Done in Niamey this 7th July 2019

FIRST LADIES OF ECOWAS MEMBER STATES