

Intervention of Antoinette Mutesa during the 28th Session of the Working Group

As the world stands to celebrate the international day of elimination of racial discrimination, a lot is being said and we also know a lot more needs to be done.

Today, I take this moment to specially shed light in the situations in which African Women and of African descent are still confronted to date.

Aside from the verbal and physical abuse they are constantly facing with in their daily lives either at work or in their personal lives, mechanisms that are supposed to address these issues are part of the problem. We all know today that history has not allowed Africans and people of African descent to benefit from exposure to certain arenas or platforms that allow them to have meaningful participation in affairs that affect them. Institutions, networks and Governments around the world are constantly speaking about issues affecting women but women are never given the opportunity to sit at the table and participate in the decision-making process. And when I speak about women of all walks of life, educated and non-educated, the poor and the rich, the widow and single, every woman has a voice and can tell her story herself.

Instruments that are developed to ensure their voices are being heard are still blocked by a group of newly created elite networks and inner circles that tell the story to favor their positions and not the position of the Women on the forefront facing those challenges daily. When we take the simple example of emancipation policies in the developing world that do not take into consideration the reality, the conditions and culture sensitivities of African Women or Women with a migrant background. Rather give an image of women who are hopeless, with low level of education, vulnerable and need to be helped rather than stimulating their advancement and providing them with tools that enable them to build on their talents and succeed in life. Only big organizations , even seen as civil society representatives, still remain an inner circle that aren't always in direct connection with women on the ground

When Women still achieve to speak, because of their weak socio-economic position and structure to support them, there are faced with attacks, intimidation's and erased from mailing list/communication so they can no longer get to intervene during fora. For those who attempt to file a complaint and denounce discrimination, they will receive response that the institutions are going to make sure such things do not happen again. So how can we expect our situations to get better when no instruments, no financial support is denied given to us to be able to stand up and speak for ourselves?

Why should the platform be given only to the elite of the society; those who have the ability to obtain a certain level education, travel and network with decision makers? And therefore, can lobby for their own priorities that do not correspond with those of all women or where their priorities?

How is the condition of African Women going to get better when they are verbally abused or exposed to micro aggressions so they can be silenced or fear to speak out their mind?

When are African Women going to be able to educate and guide their children in school when decisions are made without their consent because she is labeled with inferior education and her children are diagnosed with deficiency and all kind of labels that disqualify to pursue high education level?

When are African Women going to have access to appropriate legal support when they are seen as guilty before they are given the opportunity to speak?

When is she going to have a voice when instead funds are allocated to numerous researches, reports and meetings that could have been invested in the development, capacity building and creating an enabling environment for their meaningful participation?

The researches and reports that show no defined statistic of a part of a race in a population and when we asked we are told that it is statistically insignificant, meaning we are invisibles. So, if we are statistically insignificant, how can policies and instruments to empower us translate into meaningful impact in our lives?

The same reports and researches have described our fathers, husbands, brothers, sons, grand-sons, leaders as rapists, aggressive, corrupts, violent, criminals, jobless and all kind of names that degrade a whole generation.

By doing so adding to the struggle of the African woman, the absence of their families and support system that an essential part of her strength and perspective of life?

We are here, appealing and asking to pave the way for Women of all levels and social classes to participate equally in mechanisms that support human rights defenders to be heard. This means to ensure that this is compulsory in selection to have a certain quota at all levels; ensuring that organizations that are responsible for reporting are well known and have a transparent mechanism that ensure impartiality. We are asking that funds be allocated to self-led initiatives if we are to leave no community behind.

We are turning our voices to UN Human Right Commission to support and urge mechanisms that protect Women from intimidation, harassment, and exclusion by creating a special platform that make their participation possible and meaningful. A platform that simulate inclusive process in which not only reporting is done for the women but by women themselves and that is accessible and understandable to all.

Because no matter the level of education, everyone in the society should have a voice and be able to speak for him or herself and not through others; we must break the stranglehold of increased bureaucracy and related procedures that have excluded and continue to exclude people from obtaining justice and fair play using instruments that are in place to provide support. We need to pave the way to a third voice, the voice of the women that can speak, the women that can speak for herself without waiting for research and reports that do not do justice to who we are and even less what we need.

“Because our stories matter”

Antoinette Mutesa
Founder and Chair

Women's Initiatives Network