



COMMUNIQUE DE PRESSE

PRESS RELEASE

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ECOWAS First Ladies Affirm Commitment to End Child Marriage and Promote Girl-Child Education in the Region.

The First Ladies of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) met today, 7th July 2019 on the margins of the African Union (AU) Heads of State and Government Summit. The meeting is aimed at reinforcing the commitment of the First Ladies to end child marriage and promote the education of the girl-child in West Africa.

They made this commitment by signing **“The Niamey Declaration of ECOWAS First Ladies: Call to End Child Marriage and to promote the Education and empowerment of Girls”**.

Speaking at the opening ceremony, H.E. Jean-Claude Kassi Brou, the President of the ECOWAS Commission, who chaired the panel discussion, highlighted that 40% of girls in the ECOWAS Region marry before the age of 18 and among the 40%, about 18% are out of school.

President Brou said the situation is critical as it affects the GDP of the Region because of out-of-school girls who cannot play their role as actors of development. He added that, if the Region must develop, then the education of all girls has to be realised.

He called for sensitization at community and grassroots level, taking advantage of religious and traditional institutions as major stakeholders in the campaign.

H.E. Issoufou Mahamadou, President of Niger and Chair of the ECOWAS Authority of Heads of State and Government while delivering his remarks commended all the First Ladies for the different programmes they are implementing in their countries.

The best tool to fight early marriage, according to President Issoufou, is for young girls to be retained in school. He added (making reference to Niger), that a country cannot develop by keeping 50% of its population out of school.

He assured the First Ladies of all the support of the other Heads of State in the implementation of “the Niamey Declaration”.

Madam Lalla Issoufou Mahamadou, First Lady of Niger in her welcome remarks sought for commitment from her sisters First Ladies to end child marriage and promote the education of all girls.

She encouraged them to keep on advocating through information and communication to bring their communities close in other change their behaviours regarding child marriage. Because child marriage, she said results to early pregnancy, which expose them to obstetric fistula and risk of maternal mortality.

Apart from signing the declaration, one of the highlight of the meeting was an interactive Panel Discussion on Educating the Girl-Child and Ending Child Marriage in West Africa, which was chaired by the President of the ECOWAS Commission, H.E. Jean-Claude Kassi Brou.

Other members of the panel are, Akinwumi Adesina, President of the African Development Bank (AfDB), Ms Hannah S. Tetteh, who represented the UN Deputy Secretary-General, Madam Amina J. Mohammed, and Dr. Natalia Kanem, Executive Director of UNFPA, among others.