

# PRESS STATEMENT

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## A call to AU Member States to implement the Freedom of Expression and Access to Information principles to reduce marginalisation of girls in their diversity.

The AIDS and Rights Alliance for Southern Africa (ARASA), joins the rest of the world in commemorating the International Day of the Girl Child, whose theme is **“Digital generation. Our Generation.”**

The International Day of the Girl Child was established to address the unique challenges faced by girls worldwide, with those from Africa, marginalised the most. As we commemorate this day, African leaders are being reminded to address the girls’ right to information which affects the realisation of fundamental rights such as access to education; health; and protection from child marriages, genital mutilation, and gender-based violence (GBV).

With the **“digital generation”** focus of the 2023 International Day of the Girl Child theme, the internet can be a source of rights education for adolescent girls that can empower them to make informed decisions about their lives and future. According to the UNICEF 2020 report, about 2.2 billion children and young people aged 25 years and below, do not have internet access at home. This contributes to the digital divide with a majority of girls including those in hard-to-reach areas being excluded from lifesaving information, access to tele-medicine and other technological interventions.

The World Bank notes that Sub-Saharan Africa has among the widest gender gaps in mobile internet use in the world after South Asia, with over 190 million women and girls not having access to mobile internet services. In the absence of Comprehensive Sexuality Education (CSE) in schools, the internet remains a major source of information related to sexual and reproductive health and rights. According to a BioMed Central Study of 2021, limited access to sexuality education is a contributing factor to an increase in early and unwanted pregnancies, and a spread of sexually transmitted infections among adolescent girls.

The African Commission on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR) Declaration of Principles on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information in Africa calls upon Member States to adopt laws, policies, and other measures to promote affordable access to internet for children (including girls). Affordability and accessibility to the internet, if properly regulated, equip the girls with digital literacy skills for online education.

As we commemorate the International Day of the Girl Child, ARASA calls upon AU Member States to implement the ACHPR Declaration on Freedom of Expression and Access to Information with emphasis on the promotion of inclusive digital technologies to enable girls to enjoy their fundamental rights and reduce further marginalisation.

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