



**Statement by The Ipas Africa Alliance for Women's Reproductive Health Rights at the
56th Ordinary Session of the African Commission on Human and Peoples Rights, held on 21st April to 7th
May in Banjul, The Gambia**

The Ipas Africa Alliance for Women's Reproductive Health and Rights would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the African Commission for its recent adoption of General Comment No. 2 of the Maputo Protocol on women's right to family planning, contraception and safe abortion as provided for in Article 14 of the Protocol. This illustrates the continued commitment of the Commission to promoting the reproductive health and rights of African women.

When it concerns issues relating to women's sexual and reproductive health and rights, governments and other stakeholders all too frequently invoke religion, culture and personal beliefs as the basis upon which to deny African Women their fundamental human rights. Rights guaranteed in international agreements, including the Maputo Protocol and in national constitutions and laws.

Unsafe abortion is one of the largest contributors to maternal mortality in Africa. Every year over 6 million unsafe abortions occur in Africa, and 29,000 African women and girls die from complications arising from unsafe abortions and countless more are left with serious injuries. Young women, poor women and those living in rural areas are disproportionately affected.

The Protocol is unique amongst International treaties in its explicit recognition of the right to safe abortion for several indications, including rape, incest, sexual assault and when the life or health of the woman are at risk. **All** African countries have one or more indications for which abortion is legal and so all must have in place safe abortion services for indications available under their laws. We hereby remind member states of their commitments in the Maputo Protocol and urge them to use guidance provided in General Comment No. 2.

The Ipas Africa Alliance hereby calls on Member States yet to do so, to ratify the Maputo Protocol as a matter of priority. The 36 countries that have ratified the Protocol must remove all barriers and restrictions in their abortion laws that contravene Article 14 of the Protocol, particularly countries with the most restrictive abortion laws such as Uganda and Nigeria where we see resultant high rates of maternal mortality caused by unsafe abortion.

The Maputo Protocol was adopted over ten years ago, and guidelines for reporting on it are in place, yet no country has as yet reported on its implementation despite the requirement to do so. We recognise Malawi and Senegal that are poised to be the first countries to ever report on the Protocol during this session. We also laud Mozambique which has recently taken steps to align its abortion law with the Protocol by revising the law in December 2014.

Madam Chairperson, ladies and gentlemen, in commemoration of the AU Year of Women's Empowerment (2015) we look forward to more member states taking concrete steps to save the lives of African women and girls and reporting to the African Commission on the same.

Thank you.