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[SMS for better women rights in Africa](#)

**afrol News, 13 August** - In July last year, the African Union (AU) agreed on groundbreaking new rights for African women. Over one year later, however, only three countries have ratified this AU protocol, hindering it from entering into force. Women all over the world now send SMS appeals to call for more ratifications and thus for enhanced women's rights in Africa.

A coalition of five international and African organisations are urging mobile phone users across Africa to send text (SMS) messages to sign an online petition urging African governments to ratify the African Union's "Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa."

- Those wishing to SMS their support for the Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa can do so by sending an SMS to +27-832-933934, with the word "petition" and their name in their message, the organisations say in a recently released appeal.

The "Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa" was adopted by the African Union on 11 July 2003 but has not yet entered into force because only three countries - Comoros, Libya and Rwanda - out of a required 15 have ratified it to date. Ratification processes are often very slow in most African countries.

The AU's women's rights protocol covers a broad range of human rights issues and is a comprehensive legal framework that African women can use



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to exercise their rights. It was celebrated as groundbreaking when it was adopted by the Union in Maputo (Mozambique) last year.

Coalition member, Faiza Jama Mohamed, Africa Regional Director of the women's rights group Equality Now says; "Once it enters into force the Protocol will be a powerful new tool to achieve equal rights for women in Africa. It could well serve as a model for the rest of the world."

In the light of the UK Treasury announcement that UK aid is set to increase by UK£ 1 billion from next year, this technology could further assist to ensure that African people can influence the way that these funds will be spent in Africa. "The use of such mass based technology is going to be critical in getting people's voices heard in the 2005 G8 meetings," said Irungu Houghton of Oxfam, another organisation behind the initiative.

- Ratification will send a clear signal that women and men can and should enjoy equal rights and responsibilities, representatives from the five organisations write in a letter to African governments. "This enjoyment, in turn, will realise benefits to the whole of the continent," the letter adds.

Also the African newsletter 'Pambazuka News' has joined forces in the efforts to collect signatures. At the media's internet site, people can sign the petition online. Close to thousand signatures have already been collected, one third of these via SMS, the 'Pambazuka' website informs.

The signatories include prominent women such as Graça Machel from Mozambique. Ms Machel in an appeal writes: "I urge all African States to ratify the Protocol immediately; because African women's rights cannot be postponed as any human rights cannot be postponed."

In addition to the collection of SMS and other signatures for their petition, women groups all over Africa are currently lobbying their governments to ratify the AU Protocol as soon as possible. Women groups from Djibouti to Zimbabwe and The Gambia to Mozambique are campaigning for the ratification in their respective countries.

*By staff writers*

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