



A just world for all women and girls



*Photo credit: Steve Kagia and Y-Act*

**Solidarity statement at 7th Southern Africa Youth Forum, Antananarivo,  
Madagascar - August 2025**

Delivered by Sally

#### Protocol List for the 7<sup>th</sup> Southern Africa Youth Forum, Madagascar

1. H.E. Abdulah Marson Moustapha, Minister of Youth and Sports of the Republic of Madagascar.
2. Patron of the Southern Africa Youth Forum, Secretary General of SADC-PF, H.E. Boemo Sekgoma.
3. African Union Commission – Women, Gender and Youth Directorate. Director Ms. Prudence Nonkululeko Ngwenya.
4. Ms. Arlette Rahajarijaona, Director General, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and other Ministry Officials.
5. Government Representatives here present.
6. Chief Mentor of the SADC Youth Parliament, Mr. Sheuneni Kurasha.
7. Regional Coordinator of SAYoF, Mr. Misheck Gondo
8. SAf-CNGO Executive Director – Lebohang Mabotho.
9. Honourable Solofohanitra Toavina Jaspierre – Madagascar Parliament and Members of Madagascar Parliament here present.
  - a. 10. Hon. Neema Lugangira (Member of Parliament for Tanzania)
10. H.E. Huzfa Alhasan, Secretary General of Afro-Arab Youth Council (AAYC).
11. Hon. Antsaniavo Natolotsoa Rameliniaina SADC Youth Parliament and incoming SAYoF Co-Chair.
12. Masters of Ceremony: Mr. Mwila Bwanga -Executive Director for Be Relevant Africa, and Ms. Faly Iharisoa Rajaonarivl, Director of Youth and International Outreach Ministry of Youth and Sport, Madagascar.
13. Clerk of SADC Youth Parliament Honourable Christabel Clotilda Mhiribidi and Members of the SADC Youth Parliament here present.
14. Partners of the 7<sup>th</sup> Southern Africa Youth Forum, namely:  
Hon. Thabetha Kanengoni Malinga, Former Minister in the Vice President's Office -Zimbabwe and WOSSO Programs Manager.  
Ms. Sally Ncube – Equality Now (Regional Representative for Southern Africa).  
Ms. Bitania Lulu –Y-ACT Director and team. (AMREF).  
Representatives for Youth Combating NTDs.
15. SAYoF Cluster Heads and Members of the Secretariat.
16. Youth Delegates from SADC Member States and Africa
17. The Media, Ladies and Gentlemen.

Greetings from Equality Now

Equality Now, an international human rights organisation and co-founder of the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRI), works to achieve legal and systemic change for women and girls worldwide.

Equality Now commends and congratulates the Southern Africa Youth Forum on the successful convening of its 7th Forum under the theme **Pan-Africanism in Action: Mobilising Youth for Sustainable Development and Civic Engagement**.

***We celebrate SAYOF work*** with the SADC-PF, SADC, SAf-CNGO, and the African Union, among other regional organisations, to empower young people and ensure sustainable inclusion in developmental processes.

Adolescent and Youth marginalisation and exploitation in Southern Africa remain a critical area of concern, standing in the way of progress. Adolescents and Youth are at risk of Harmful cultural practices, including child marriage and female genital mutilation, sex trafficking, online harms and Technology-facilitated gender-based violence (TFGBV), legal inequalities, and marginalisation in decision-making and policy-making processes, platforms, and structures of governance in Southern Africa. TFGBV is a growing global concern, using social media, messaging apps, and smart devices to harm based on gender. Women and girls are disproportionately affected. The SADC Model Law on GBV offers strong guidance, covering online exploitation, trafficking, and cyberbullying. But we must close gaps in enforcement, survivor protection, and cross-border cooperation.

Equality Now, a global human rights organisation dedicated to creating a just world for women and girls, is proud to lead initiatives that advance gender equality both online and offline. One such initiative is the Alliance for Universal Digital Rights (AUDRI), a global coalition of over 45 civil society organisations with strong membership from Africa, including Southern Africa. AUDRI was founded in 2022 by Equality Now and Women Leading in AI. We advocate for a feminist-informed digital future that upholds fundamental human rights, especially for women, girls, and marginalised communities who experience the greatest harm in digital spaces.

In recent years, significant progress has been made in recognising digital rights, advancing legal reforms, and developing programs promoting inclusion and accountability for digital governance worldwide. The Pact for the Future, of which the Global Digital Compact (the GDC) is part, was adopted in September 2024. AUDRI, along with others in a Gender in the GDC coalition, successfully advocated for the inclusion of a standalone action line on gender in the GDC. However, as we move from global political commitments to localisation and context-based implementation, there is a need to facilitate platforms for raising awareness on existing commitments, international law frameworks, oversight and accountability mechanisms and institutions in place. AUDRI's Africa Cluster will push for a robust regional civil society movement to ensure digital rights have a gender dimension and address the urgency of inclusion and equality in all processes accompanying the fast pace of technology development, and mitigate harms such as TFGBV, which draw back and foster rights violations with impunity.

Existing mechanisms and frameworks face enormous challenges, particularly related to their effective implementation, including critical areas such as survivor protection and support, enforcement and accountability across the region, necessitating continued efforts in cross-border cooperation, capacity building, and addressing the underlying vulnerabilities that contribute to harms against women, girls, and other vulnerable groups.

SADC must recognise that women and girls in the global majority and the Southern African region are particularly vulnerable to harms such as bias in AI datasets, the effects of climate change from ICT infrastructure, a deepening digital divide exacerbated by emerging technology, and a rise in TFGBV.

To adequately address these risks, we urge SAYOF and SADC Youth Parliament to ensure that Member States integrate the feminist digital principles into all aspects of digital rights. The core principles of openness, freedom, and security must be infused with an intersectional feminist perspective to ensure that the ongoing digital transformation of our economies and societies can usher in a gender-just world that affirms all individuals and their path to self-actualisation. The feminist digital principles are:

1. Ensure concrete commitments to close the youth digital divide through accelerating legal and budget reforms for rural and disability inclusive digital access, supported by education reforms to teach digital skills early, with gender equality in all learning institutions.
2. Enact, enforce and strengthen laws to ensure legal and policy frameworks that protect the digital rights of women and girls and marginalised groups against GBV, misinformation, and cyberbullying, guided by the AU's 2024 Child Online Safety and Empowerment Policy and ensure effective and inclusive youth and gender responsive oversight.
3. Guarantee freedom from technology-facilitated gender-based violence.
4. Promote universal rights to freedom of expression, privacy, peaceful assembly, and participation of women and girls in all their diversity in all aspects of life.

5. Ensure universal, affordable, accessible, and safe internet access for all.
6. Demand strict action against harmful surveillance applications and high-risk AI systems, and set safeguards to prevent discriminatory biases.
7. Increase and expand young women's participation and leadership in digital governance at all levels and in technology.
8. Prioritise strategies that reduce the environmental impact of new technologies
9. Implement measures for states and transnational corporations to ensure data privacy, governance, and consent.
10. Adopt Equality-by-Design principles and a human-rights-based approach throughout all phases of digital technology development.
11. Re-shape the participation and role of women in accessing and using digital technology. And address its potential impacts on labour and entrepreneurship.

The development of the feminist principles shared was facilitated through a dynamic and multifaceted process, drawing inspiration and guidance from a range of sources, such as the Agreed Conclusions of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) 67; the conclusions of a UN Women & Equality Now consultation event at CSW; and a submission to the Global Digital Compact consultation by APC, following an event with gender rights and digital organisations in March 2023. The principles also draw on the United Nations Human Rights Council, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and, closer to home, the Maputo Protocol. **We call upon the SADC Member States to endorse these principles, joining other governments such as Brazil.**

Additionally, we call for SADC and its members to ensure the full implementation of the Global Digital Compact over the next few years, with particular efforts to **employ an inclusive multistakeholder approach towards national and regional GDC monitoring, evaluation, and implementation, including the mid-term review process.** Gender-inclusive representation must be recognised as foundational to equitable digital governance, with public financing mechanisms to support the sustained and effective participation of feminist organisations. This approach must extend to all regional and international frameworks, such as the WSIS process, where **SADC members can support the call for a standalone action line on Gender and the effective mainstreaming of gender across all action lines.**

Protecting and promoting the civic, political, economic, social and cultural rights of women, girls, and other marginalised communities face growing challenges within the digital public sphere and transnational data and AI value chains. Transnational technology corporations remain largely unaccountable for human rights violations – particularly those of gendered nature – facilitated through their platforms and data infrastructures. **The UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights** affirm protection against human rights abuses by digital technology corporations in global value chains. We also urge Member States to ensure corporate accountability and put in place measures for companies to comply with safety and equality by design principles and approaches.

In closing, Equality Now, through the AUDRi initiative, reaffirms its commitment to working with SAYOF, SADC Youth Parliament, SADC Member States, youth, and civil society partners to ensure that digital transformation in our region is inclusive, rights-based, and gender-just. We urge all stakeholders to adopt and operationalise the feminist digital principles outlined in this statement, and to embed them into national and regional policies, legislation, and governance frameworks. By acting decisively, SADC can lead in building a digital future that safeguards the rights, dignity, and opportunities of all, especially women, girls, and marginalised communities,

and in doing so, strengthen equality, non-discrimination and sustainable development across Southern Africa.

Equality Now remains committed to partnering with SAYOF - bringing collaboration, advocacy, and technical expertise.

We urge all stakeholders to place young voices, especially young women, at the centre of governance and development.

Honourable Chair, distinguished delegates —

We wish you a successful 7th Southern Africa Youth Forum and fruitful deliberations ahead.

Thank you.