
	Time	Page
African Group Calls for the Enactment of Genetic Law <i>African delegates at the fifth Conference of Parties on Biological diversity held in Nairobi stress the need to protect community and farmers rights.</i>	4mins. 35secs.	3
Animal Welfare Agency Raps Namibian Seal Hunt <i>Namibia's decision to expand her seal harvesting industry has come under criticism from the International Fund for Animal Welfare</i>	4mins. 30mins.	3
Cement Factory Urged to be More Sensitive to the Environment <i>A challenge to cement factories in Africa to invest in environmental management and protection has been made in Kenya</i>	2mins. 30secs.	4
Ghana: Breaking the Silence <i>A new report sheds new light on the issues involved in violence against women in Ghana</i>	7mins.	4
Governments Meet to Review Protection of African Wildlife <i>As parties to a major agreement against the illegal trade in fauna and flora in Africa meet in Nairobi, analysts agree that this is a major step in support of African initiatives to protect wildlife.</i>	4mins. 15secs.	5
Zimbabwe Records Greater Participation of Women in Recent Elections <i>Zimbabwean women attempted to boost their numbers in the recently concluded parliamentary elections.</i>	6mins.	5
The Press as Mediators in Times of Conflict <i>A recent workshop held in Nigeria, calls for a paradigm shift in the responsibilities of the media in terms of conflict</i>	3mins. 8secs.	6
Preserving Endangered Sharks in West Africa <i>Conservationists call for the protection sharks and varying species of skates in the West African sub region</i>	10mins. 6secs.	7
President Clinton Signs Two Key Protocols <i>The United States becomes one of the first countries to sign two key United Nations protocols that strengthen global standards on the protection of children</i>	2mins. 9secs.	8
Rapid Urbanisation: Major Threat to Health and Environment <i>A United Nations report has identified unplanned urbanization as a major health hazard in Southern Africa</i>	8mins. 33secs.	8
Amnesty International Calls for an End to Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone <i>The human rights organization has identified abduction rape and sexual slavery as being among the most abhorrent features of the nine-year old armed conflict in Sierra Leone</i>	9mins. 48secs.	9

Beijing plus 5 : African Delegates disappointed with Women's Summit	9mins. 9secs.	10
--	----------------------	-----------

The much awaited women's conference has come and gone but it seems to have fallen way below the expectations of many.

Subsistence Farming Depletes Malawi's Forests	1min. 9 secs.	12
--	----------------------	-----------

Malawi has been identified as having the highest rate of deforestation in the Southern Africa Development Community region

Noted...

AENS Wins International Press Freedom Award	1 mins. 28secs.	12
--	------------------------	-----------

The Power of Statistics	3mins. 29secs.	12
--------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------

Children's Section

How Nwapfundhala Chops Wood	6mins. 18secs.	13
------------------------------------	-----------------------	-----------

Nwapfundhala, the hare, learns the value of friendship

The First Zebra	8mins. 9secs.	13
------------------------	----------------------	-----------

Why the Zebra sports a shiny black and white coat but no horns!

Parting Shots

Unforgettable Quotes on Conservation and Development.		15
--	--	-----------

African Group Calls for the Enactment of Genetic Law

4mins. 35secs.

African delegates at the recent Fifth Conference of the Parties of the Convention on Biological Diversity held in Nairobi during May 15-26 have stressed the need to protect community and farmers' rights from piracy through co-ordinated efforts in the relevant agencies dealing with such issues.

In their two-page declaration, read out by an Ethiopian delegate, the African Group also called for the fostering of leadership of local communities in continued conservation and sustainable use of biodiversity as well as their full participation in all decision making. The African Group were part of some 1,500 delegates who attended the Nairobi conference on Convention on Biological Diversity - COP 5.

The group also called for the promotion of sustainable farming community agriculture using both traditional and modern techniques to increase the use of agro-biodiversity and to harness ecological dynamics to boost and protect production. The Group further encouraged the enactment of the national laws consistent with the African Model Legislation for the Protection of Rights of Local Communities, Farmers and Breeders and for the Regulation of Access to Biological Resources (OAU, 1998).

In their declaration, they noted: "As a matter of priority, the issue of repatriation of Africa's genetic resources abroad, access to, and the sharing of benefits accruing from the use of Africa's genetic resources in terms of Convention on Biological Diversity, CBD should be addressed". The African Group opposed to the patenting of life forms, saying that there was a need for a push for a global enabling condition for forest biodiversity, conservation and sustainable use in the relevant forum. The African delegates appealed to all development and funding agencies in the spirit of Agenda 21, to provide technical and financial support to African countries and initiatives with regard to capacity building in priority areas of CBD.

All Africa News Agency

Animal Welfare Agency Raps Namibian Seal Hunt

4mins. 30mins.

The International Fund for Animal Welfare has expressed deep concern over the recent announcement by the Namibian Government that it will expand its seal harvesting industry. The Namibian cabinet last week approved a recommendation by the fisheries minister, Dr. Abraham Iyambo, to double the number of seal concession holders from two to four. Iyambo had earlier in the year said the government planned to "drastically increase" seal harvesting quotas in 2000, claiming that a rapidly increasing seal population in Namibian waters posed a threat to the local fishing industry. The country's 2000 sealing season begins in August.

Sarah Scarth, director of the fund for Southern Africa, said the organisation had followed the development of the annual hunt for many years and had not seen any evidence - scientific or otherwise - to support the need of expanding the Namibian seal harvesting industry. She added that there were serious questions around the sustainability of the current seal harvest. Currently there is no agreeable method to assess the seal population or to determine their annual growth. It would thus be contradictory to increase the quota to support an expanded sealing industry in the absence of such information.

"We also know of no scientific evidence that would justify a Namibian seal cull to benefit fisheries. Scientific studies from around the world, notably Canada, have shown that over-fishing is most responsible for the demise of fish stocks, not predation by seals," she said. "If quotas are to be increased, information regarding the sustainability of the hunt should be made available for independent scientific scrutiny," she added.

Namibia's hunting quota in 1999 was for 30,000 seal pups and 5,000 seal bulls. According to the last census, conducted in December 1997, the total seal pup population was estimated to be 905,000. No

figure for bull seals was available.

Panafrican News Agency

Cement Factory Urged to be More Sensitive to the Environment **2mins. 30secs.**

Cement factories in Africa have been challenged to invest more in environmental management and protection in order to protect people living in their vicinity and the environment from massive pollution.

Kenya's tourism, trade and industry minister, Nicholas Biwott, said the companies should stop concentrating on profits at the expense of the environment and human health. This was said at a seminar on awareness of cement effects. Biwott asked Kenya's main cement factories to play a pivotal role in reclaiming the environment they have exploited. He urged the cement manufacturers to emulate the Mombasa-based Bamburi Cement factory that is renowned for environmental rehabilitation.

"It would be worthwhile for the cement industry to invest more in environmental protection", the minister said, urging the companies to be innovative. Sponsored by Kenya Bureau of Standards, the seminar brought together leading stakeholders in the country's cement industry.

Kenya currently consumes over 500,000 million metric tonnes of cement annually, which translates to 50 kg per person per year.

Panafrica News Agency

Ghana: Breaking the Silence **7mins.**

Violence against women is a reality but very few women are prepared to talk about their experiences. More often than not, women face numerous barriers that discourage them from talking.

When they choose to talk about their experiences, however, state agencies are the least likely venue for them to report; they prefer to report to family, friends or members of the community.

These are some of the findings of a new report on violence against women and children. Titled "Breaking the Silence and Challenging the Myths of Violence against Women and Children in Ghana", the report is a collaborative work involving the Gender Studies and Human Rights Documentation Centre (GSHDRC), the Trade Union Congress (TUC), the Centre for the Development of People (CEDEP), Action Aid, Bawku East Women's Development Association (BEWDA), World Neighbours, Centre for Sustainable Development Initiatives (CENSUDI) and Associates in Development (ASSID). The report covered 20 districts in all the 10 regions of the country. The research techniques involved focus group discussions, questionnaires and key informant interviews.

The report underscored the importance of family and friends as a means of support when women experience violence in all its forms. For women that reported physical violence - 9 out of 10 reported at the informal level (family, religious leaders and friends) while 1 in 10 reported at state agencies (police and courts).

The report lists a number of reasons why women are reluctant to report or talk about violence, including shame, shyness or timidity on the part of the victim, the ability of the society to trivialise women's experiences of violence, and women's lack of confidence in reporting agencies. Other reasons given were culture and social habits, previous action taken against perpetrators, financial cost, fear and family pressure. For example almost 2 in 10 did not leave their male partners who had been violent, due to pressure from family and friends while almost half of the women interviewed did not leave abusive partners because of children.

According to the report, sexual violence such as rape, incest and harassment are considered taboo topics generally. These incidents are under-reported and the subject is not easily discussed. Similar reasons were cited even when it came to reporting forced sex. On financial cost, the report notes that 18% of women injured during a physical assault did not seek treatment because they had no money of their own.

The report concluded by stating that there is need to increase the capacity of organisations and individuals to be able to respond to reported cases of violence against women and children. To facilitate this, it recommends the development of policies and procedures for response and guidelines for the collection and management of information on violence against women and children.

“The research”, says Professor Akua Kuenyehia of the Faculty of Law, University of Ghana, “will provide stakeholders with the necessary data to address the issue of violence and an opportunity to work towards real solutions”.

Accra Mail

Governments Meet to Review Protection of African Wildlife **4mins. 15secs.**

Parties to a major agreement against the illegal trade in fauna and flora in Africa opened a meeting in Nairobi, Kenya on the 5th of July to review United Nations’ and other reports on the status of their efforts. The Governing Council of the “Lusaka Agreement” - formally called the Lusaka Agreement on Cooperative Enforcement Operations Directed at Illegal Trade in Wild Fauna and Flora - met at the headquarters of its Task Force, located at the Kenya Wildlife Service.

“This is another important step forward in our ongoing efforts to support African governments’ initiatives to deal with the illegal traffic in fauna and flora,” said Jim Sniffen, an Information Officer with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The Lusaka Agreement was developed under the auspices of UNEP, and the Governing Council is considering reports by that agency’s Executive Director, as well as a report by the Director of the Lusaka Task Force.

The Task Force, referred to by many as the “African Interpol for Wildlife” was established under the Agreement to fight wildlife crime in Africa through cooperative investigations and information sharing and dissemination. Members of the Governing Council, who comprise the six parties to the Agreement, are also reporting on their efforts to facilitate the work of the Task Force. According to UNEP, the officers of the Task Force, in collaboration with designated national bureaus, have successfully conducted cross-border and under cover operations which have resulted in the catching of hundreds of tons of ivory tusks and fire arms as well as the arrests of several poachers.

The parties to the Agreement are the Republic of Congo, Kenya, Lesotho, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia. Ethiopia, South Africa and Swaziland have signed the treaty, which entered into force on 10 December 1996.

United Nations

Greater Participation of Women in Zimbabwe’s Elections **6mins.**

Zimbabwean women attempted to boost their numbers in the parliamentary elections on June 24 and 25 with 55 of them from the ruling and opposition parties seeking seats, the largest number of female candidates in the country’s 20-year history.

The last parliament, dissolved on the 11th of April, had 21 women members, one of whom was from the opposition. The ruling party ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union - Patriotic Front) fielded the largest number of women candidates this election with 20 running. The Movement for Democratic Change (MDC), which was formed nine months ago, put forward 11 women out of its 120 candidates.

However, women's pressure groups are far from impressed with the numbers, though a significant feature in party manifestos are elaborate provisions for empowering women at the grassroots. For instance, the MDC pledged to promote a "grassroots process" towards gender equality in economic, social and political life, saying it would ensure that women were not unfairly prejudiced by their childbearing and reproductive role in relation to employment or economic opportunity. ZANU-PF resolved that a minimum quota of 50 seats in its central committee must be allocated to women. At the party's congress held at the end of last year, another resolution was passed that for every three positions, a woman must occupy one. But the resolutions are yet to be implemented.

With women constituting 52 percent of the population and representation not quite above the half-way mark of the set SADC target, women's movements are pressing for more concrete action. The country does not match up with the rest of southern Africa's leaders in gender balance. South Africa and Mozambique, both of which are close to fulfilling the 30 percent quota provided for in the declaration signed in 1997 by the heads of state of the Southern African Development Community, (SADC) which each of the 14 member countries must reach by the year 2005.

South Africa currently has the highest representation of women in parliament and cabinet in the region. Their 400-member parliament has 119 women or 29.8 percent, a mark very close to the minimum required by the 1997 declaration. Mozambique ranks second at 28.4 percent of the 250-member parliament, 71 of whom are women but the cabinet of 37 has only one woman. Both the African National Congress, the South African ruling party and FRELIMO, Mozambique's ruling party, have a 30 percent quota system for women in their party structures which has helped increase their participation in decision-making positions. Malawi, Swaziland and Lesotho are the lowest in terms of women's representation in parliament in the SADC region, with all of them standing below the 11 percent mark.

Southern African Research and Documentation Centre

The Press as Mediators in Times of Conflict

3mins. 8secs.

A workshop organised by a non-governmental organisation, Negotiation and Conflict Management Group and sponsored by the United States Agency for international Development Office of Transition Initiatives (USAID – OTI); resolved in a communique that; there should be a paradigm shift from the media's usual path of the jurist informing and entertaining when the issue is conflict and set agenda for solution. The national workshop which was primarily aimed at communal and religious conflicts resolution attracted both community and religious leaders, as well as individuals from the academic community. The participants also included journalists from Nigeria's leading print, radio and television establishments.

In the eleven point communique, the participants at the workshop agreed that the media in reporting conflicts should focus more on the positive aspects of conflicts instead of the negative which was presently the case in Nigeria. The media was also tasked to support NGOs that are involved in finding positive results in conflict resolutions. The workshop found that the media's traditional role of reporting conflict needed to change. The press, they argued were more intent on making a capital out of conflicts instead of seeking solutions.

One of the speakers, Joan Mbagwu, said the press must help in the management of conflict in a constructive way such that the resultant effect becomes development, change, understanding, resolution, friendship, interaction, communication, progress, peace, love, and increased knowledge. She concluded “it is important to leave our minds open and know that every conflict situation might create an opportunity for change and development, if we manage that conflict constructively and refrain from running away from it or leave it to result into violence”.

Post Express

Preserving Endangered Sharks in West Africa

10mins. 6secs.

Over 50 different types of sharks and more than 30 species of skates and similar fish live in complete insecurity in the West African sub-region, from Mauritania to Guinea, including Cape Verde.

In view of man’s over-exploitation of skates and sharks and the risk of losing biological diversity, organisations such as the World Union for the Protection of Nature (IUCN) and the World Wide Fund (WWF), have initiated sensitisation and research projects as well as those aimed at ensuring follow-ups in the field. On a world-wide scale, the UN Food and Agriculture Organization has since 1999 developed an international shark management and preservation action plan, which proposes certain research and regulations for adoption by member states. The Fondation Internationale du Banc d’Arguin (FIBA), in collaboration with IUCN and national institutions, has since 1997, been implementing a research project on sharks in the sub-region, with a view to documenting and monitoring the West African situation. The catch at local fishing grounds along the coasts, from Mauritania to Guinea, were examined, and accounts collected with regard to the development of the skate and shark population; the research reveals a critical situation of over-exploitation.

The study showed that some species, such as sawfish, no longer existed in the sub-region, while others, like the African straw fish, the tiger shark, lemon shark or the big hammerhead shark, are in extreme danger. This is partly because their biology is characterised by a long life, very late sexual maturity (15 years or more in some species), a viviparous reproduction in almost all species (do not lay eggs but deliver complete and autonomous ‘babies’) with an extremely long gestation period (over a year for some species) and a very reduced fertility (less than 10 ‘babies’ carried by most of them). Moreover, the rhythm of population renewal is so slow that the stocks crumble as soon as they are exposed to targeted or intensive exploitation.

And yet, the shark plays a crucial role of regulator between marine species in the sea, and its growing shortage may lead to the proliferation of undesired species, if not to the radical change in the behaviour of prey species. The over-exploitation and gradual extinction of sharks may result in the shaking up of the whole marine ecosystem balance.

The situation is not helped by the rising demand for shark products. Today, the cost of products has risen sharply. A kilo of good quality dried fins costs several hundreds of US dollars in Hong Kong while is bought from the fishermen at about 50 to 70 US dollars in West African countries. Because of the advantages offered by such a market, which no doubt represents the greatest danger for the species’ survival, many fishermen have become specialised in shark fishing.

Considering the dual ecological and socio-economic risks, conservation bodies, in collaboration with the sub-regional Fisheries Commission (CSRP), recently organised a workshop for consultations on shark fishing and the sustainable management of the species. The workshop brought together all the actors in the field (fishermen, middlemen and traders) with scientific researchers and representatives of Fisheries Ministries of countries of the sub-region.

Recommendations highlighted the importance of finding a sub-regional solution for the species as well as for migrant fishermen, through a CSRFP co-ordinated action plan. The need to strengthen research on the environment and the biology of species and to better describe the exploitation chain was also stressed, with a view to having reliable information to review existing measures and regulations. The meeting agreed on the need to institute conservation measures, by protecting areas and periods of reproduction and by reducing the fishing efforts, in general. A clear consensus was reached on the need to support specialised local fishermen in their re-conversion efforts which will enable them to direct their activities towards other fisheries resources and avoid bankruptcy. Other actors, such as middlemen and traders, should also be taken into account. Donors were requested to support grassroots communities and states prepared to participate in these various efforts. Finally, all the participants strongly insisted on the need to sensitise public opinion, develop information capacities of actors and managers, and communicate knowledge through the media and education programmes.

All these recommendations will be taken into account during the preparation of the sub-regional action plan for the preservation and management of the shark population, of the sub-regional commission. The efficiency of this initiative will largely depend on the commitment of the competent authorities as well as donor support.

Panafrican News Agency

President Clinton Signs Two Key Protocols

2mins. 9secs.

On July 8, 2000, the United States became one of the first countries to sign two key United Nations protocols that strengthen global standards for the protection of children after President Clinton put his signature to the treaties at a ceremony at UN Headquarters in New York.

Welcoming the US leadership in signing the two optional protocols to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on protecting children against prostitution and involvement in armed conflict, the UN Deputy Secretary-General Louise Frechette said the move would “undoubtedly inspire other countries to add their names to these instruments.”

The two instruments reflected an “international sense of justice” and the shared belief that “children deserve love and protection,” President Clinton said as he pledged to send both protocols to the US Senate, and expressed the hope that they could be ratified this year. The US appreciated that it had been given the chance to play a leading role in negotiating the agreements, and was among the first nations to sign them, the President said. He pledged his best efforts to see that the US was also a leader in implementing the instruments, so that the children of the world would have “a future far better than the past.”

Addis Tribune

Rapid Urbanisation: Major Threat to Health and Environment

8mins. 33secs.

Unplanned rapid urbanisation has been identified as a health hazard in southern Africa leading to conditions that spread serious diseases. These diseases stem from environmental problems such as contaminated water, poor sanitation, smoke-polluted indoor air and exposure to mosquitoes, along with other examples of crowded living conditions. According to a United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) report, Global Environmental Outlook 2000, these environmental health problems in developing countries are now exacerbated by emerging problems of industrial and agricultural pollution. Chemicals used in both primary sectors are major factors in causing and worsening tuberculosis, bronchitis, heart disease, cancer and asthma. Increased exposure to chemical health risks in urban areas is particularly harmful to children and pregnant women.

Most African cities were developed as colonial administrative and trading centres rather than industrial and commercial centres equipped to support large populations. As a result, well-serviced expensive city centres are often surrounded by underdeveloped and inadequately serviced settlements supporting most of the population. The quality of housing and services varies greatly. Urban authorities have been unable to keep up with the explosive growth of squatter communities and shanty towns. The poor are often cramped in inadequate housing along floodplains or other areas that are vulnerable to pollution because that is the only place where they can afford to rent or build accommodation in urban parts of Malawi, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe, says a report by the International Institute for Environment and Development (IIED). Stream bank cultivation is now rampant around southern African cities and towns as people seek to counter the effects of poverty resulting in contamination of water sources by fertilizers and pesticides applied in these small, unplanned farm plots.

According to the UNEP report, nearly half of the world's population will live in urban centres by the end of the 20th century. Currently, 30-60 percent of the world's urban population are in low-income countries, and lack adequate housing with sanitary facilities, drainage systems, and clean piped water. Malaria and dengue fever are some of the common diseases spreading as a result of unplanned urbanisation. The two primary mosquitoes causing these diseases have adapted from their natural forest environments, where they breed in tree holes containing rainwater, to the urban environment where they breed in drains, water cans, discarded tyres, pots and bottles.

The quality of air is also affected by the industrialisation that occurs with urbanisation. Air pollution levels are neither monitored nor controlled in most cities in Africa, but while air pollution is still low compared with other areas, it is becoming a problem at local levels, especially in major cities. The quality of rain reflects broadly the state of atmospheric pollution in the region. One of the more damaging products of such pollution is acid rain which is caused by sulphur dioxide set free in the atmosphere where it dissolves in the moisture to form sulphuric acid. Acid rain damages soil, plant leaves and water with a consequent ill-effect on human health.

Due to these many environmental factors, areas settled by the urban poor are often fragile, and the concentration of population contributes to the degradation. Since urbanisation has adverse effects on the environment and preventing it is next to impossible, slowing the rural to urban drift by developing rural centres would allow the latter to enhance their employment capabilities. Such a move will have to be complemented by sound economic policies that discourage rural-urban drift. This will reduce the strain on the services and infrastructure in urban areas and alleviate environmental degradation.

Southern African Research and Documentation Centre

Amnesty International Calls for an End to Sexual Violence in Sierra Leone 9mins. 48secs.

Abduction, rape and sexual slavery of girls and women in Sierra Leone must be stopped, says Amnesty International in a new report released on the 2nd of July 2000. These practices have been among the most abhorrent and distressing features of the nine-year internal armed conflict in Sierra Leone. "Rape, sexual slavery and other forms of sexual violence by rebel forces have been systematic and widespread," notes the human rights organization which is making specific recommendations to all the forces involved and the wider international community.

Thousands of women of all ages have been raped and abducted. Often they have been forced to become the sexual partner or "wife" of combatants. Beyond the brutality and trauma of rape itself, sexual assault can result in serious physical injury, forced pregnancy, disease and even death. The terror wreaked by rebel forces on civilians has also included men being forced to rape members of their own family under threat of being mutilated by having their hands or arms cut off.

Despite the peace agreement signed in Lome, Togo, in July 1999 between the government of Sierra Leone and the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), human rights abuses against civilians, including rape and other forms of sexual violence, have continued. Renewed insecurity and fighting since May have further aggravated the incidence of rape. In mid-May rebel forces from the RUF raped and abducted girls and women in the area around Masiaka, some 40 kilometres from the capital Freetown. Among the victims was a woman in her twenties, with a five-month old baby, who was abducted after rebel forces took control of Masiaka. At the time of her abduction she was stripped and raped by seven combatants. Taken to a rebel camp, she was repeatedly raped and was later forced to carry supplies, cook and cut wood.

The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) has a mandate to protect civilians under imminent threat of physical violence. To carry out this mandate effectively, the UNAMSIL must adopt a more determined and active approach to protecting civilians, including girls and women at risk of abduction, rape and other forms of sexual violence. This should include extending, as far as possible, the area of deployment of UNAMSIL troops, particularly in those areas of Northern Province where abuses against civilians are continuing, and making every effort to defend civilians from attacks by rebel forces.

While some assistance is being provided in Freetown by non-governmental organizations to help victims of rape and sexual violence, much more needs to be done, especially outside Freetown where little or no help is available, says Amnesty International. Under customary international law, rape committed by government officials or armed opposition groups during armed conflict constitutes torture. Rape by combatants in the conduct of armed conflict is now recognized as a war crime and, when committed on a systematic basis or large scale, it is a crime against humanity. As such, it is subject to universal jurisdiction.

In Sierra Leone the systematic way in which rape and sexual violence have been used, and committed so extensively with impunity, indicates a deliberate strategy to use rape and sexual violence against women and girls as a weapon of war and to instil terror. The peace agreement of July 1999 provided a blanket amnesty for all acts including human rights abuses, perpetrated during the conflict. Amnesty International believes the amnesty in the peace agreement violates fundamental human rights principles by providing impunity to the perpetrators of gross human rights abuses and provides no deterrent against further abuses. The United Nations added a disclaimer to the peace agreement underlining the fact that the amnesty did not apply to crimes against humanity, war crimes and other serious violations of human rights and humanitarian law.

“There can be no amnesty for the systematic rape and sexual violence against women and girls in Sierra Leone which amount to war crimes and crimes against humanity”, says Amnesty International. “All those who are responsible must be brought to justice.”

Amnesty International

Beijing plus 5 : African Delegates Disappointed with Women’s Summit 9mins. 9secs.

As the Beijing Plus Five conference wound down on Thursday (June 8) consensus has emerged that not much has been achieved. The conference began with high hopes that governments would not only recommit themselves to promises made at the Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China five years ago, but that they would embrace other measures to ensure gender parity. But as the conference drew to its close liberal delegates and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) found themselves fighting a rearguard action to defend the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, the document whose implementation they had gathered to review.

The week had been characterised by thorny negotiations for a conference document acceptable to all governments. What should have been an assessment of how countries have progressed on gender advancement and a push forward, became an occasion for a rehashing of old controversies on sexual and reproductive rights. To applause from an African NGO caucus, G77 negotiator Timi Kuripamo-Agary said: "We have done everything to retain the Beijing Platform for Action. We tried very hard not to water it down." She said the G77 countries in general and the Africa Group of countries in particular had secured some agreements they could live with. These cover the gender implications of debt and globalisation as well as a pledge from developed countries that they would begin to accede to the benchmark figure of 0.7 percent of gross domestic product for aid disbursements.

But key rights were watered down in the course of the conference. These included sexual and reproductive rights as well as the recognition of women's rights as human rights. According to Amnesty International: "Some governments are still attempting to backtrack from the Beijing Platform for Action and weaken what was agreed to five years ago. It is supposed to be Beijing Plus Five, not Minus Five."

Negotiations on the conference outcome have been fractious with schisms emerging between the G77 countries and the developed world over issues such as globalisation, poverty and debt. There were also divisions between the Muslim and Christian religious worlds and liberal countries on sexual and reproductive rights. A negotiator said "It's hard to remember when [negotiations] have been more difficult. They are hopelessly bogged down."

Meanwhile African NGOs issued a report lambasting the United Nations for the treatment they have received this week. "We are disappointed that we have been made to feel like intruders on the process. We seem to have gone back on free participation," said Zambian NGO delegate, Gladys Mutukwa.

African governments have been late in coming to the party because of poor organisation and poor resources. While developed countries have been preparing and meeting for months, the Africa Group only met in the week of the conference. Although some, particularly the Southern African Development Community countries have fought a good fight in the negotiations, Africa has been conspicuous by its absence. A cursory glance at the draft outcome document shows that no ground has been won on the critical gender concerns highlighted as vital for African women.

The frustrations experienced at the Beijing Plus Five conference has raised concerns that the women's movement is being "bureaucratised". Global gender advancement seems to have become an unwieldy and exclusive technocratic process, which leaves no place in the halls of power for political advancement and activism. All energy and focus at UN conferences is directed on "the document", "brackets" and "language".

"The women's movement internationally must reclaim itself," says South African representative Pregs Govender. The biggest lesson from Beijing Plus Five, she says, is that the "women's movement is being co-opted. We've become technocratic rather than transformative. Women's advancement is a profoundly political issue, yet the conference itself was a largely apolitical process. Activism was left on the fringes".

On the eve of the close of the Women's summit, frustrated women stood outside the negotiating chambers at the UN sporting angry T-shirts, which read, "No going back". Excluded from the process, they were left to voice their anger on the margins. It is not an end that was anticipated. At the beginning of the 21st century, it seemed that, for women, time had stood still.

InterPress Service Africa

Subsistence Farming Depletes Malawi's Forests

1min. 9 secs.

Malawi has the highest rate of deforestation in the 14-member Southern Africa Development Community region. Ironically, war-torn Angola has the lowest.

Malawi's deputy director of forestry, Paulos Mwale, has told PANA that the country's deforestation rate is over 1.8 percent against the average 0.2 per cent in most SADC member states. Mwale, who is member of the SADC forestry sector technical co-ordination unit, said Malawi's high rate of deforestation is due to over-dependence on subsistence agriculture whereby large tracts of land are cleared for farming. In the long run this practice depletes soil fertility, he said. "Population boom also plays a factor in Malawi's high rate of deforestation," he added.

At least 50,000 hectares of Malawi's forests are cleared every year and foresters say this is a very high rate natural resource consumption.

Panafrican News Agency

Noted...

AENS Wins International Press Freedom Award

1 mins. 28secs.

The African Eye News Service, AENS, was announced winner of this year's Knight International Press Freedom Award in the United States on Thursday. The prestigious award honours outstanding individuals or organisations which have made remarkable contributions to the media in their region of the world. Candidates are nominated by Knight International Press Fellows, who are U.S. journalists travelling overseas to share their skills with international colleagues. The awards will be presented at the International Centre for Journalists' annual Excellence in Journalism Dinner scheduled for October 11, 2000 in Washington DC.

African Eye News Service (South Africa)

The Power of Statistics

3mins. 29secs.

Flash a couple of figures in the face of a sceptic and chances are that you will take home a convert. Such is the power of statistics. And no one knows this better than the media. Many a times we have relied on numbers to prove a point, state a case and push our numerous generic and acquired biases.

It is against this background that one must take a very objective and critical view of the rate at which the western media churn out statistics on Africa. None is more guilty of this trend than many western media organizations. Since the onset of the AIDS pandemic on the continent, many of these organizations have led a massive media blitz that has led to a lot of awareness about the situation on the continent. The reputation of these media organizations has also helped to legitimise a lot of opinions. Some right. Some not so right. Some out rightly wrong and baseless. For instance, in the in dept analysis section of CNN.com, "AIDS: Africa in peril" notes that:

"West Africa is not as badly affected(as East Africa) but 1 in 20 adults in Nigeria, Africa's most populous nation...are HIV positive. Every minute another Nigerian becomes infected"

With Nigeria's notorious reputation for not keeping records and a dearth of adequate research facility, one might ask, "where did the CNN get their figures?"

CFC

Children's Section

How Nwapfundhala Chops Wood

6mins. 18secs.

Nwapfundhla, the hare, and Nwafene, the baboon, were courting in the same village and Nwapfundhla was the first one to find himself a girlfriend. Nwafene felt very jealous of his success and this led to hard feelings between the two friends. Finally, Nwapfundhla said to Nwafene, 'Don't worry, old friend, I will fix you up with a girlfriend.'

Now Nwapfundhla was very tactful. He chose a girl who had not yet met Nwafene and he explained that appearances were not everything – it was the character underneath that mattered. By the time Nwapfundhla had finished describing Nwafene's character in glowing terms to the young lady, she could hardly resist him and so Nwafene also had a girlfriend.

However, even then the friendship was still strained.

One morning Nwapfundhla decided to teach Nwafene a lesson. 'Come with me to chop wood' he said to his girlfriend. She picked up the axe and the two strolled into the forest. Here Nwapfundhla chose a tree which they cut down, split open and hollowed out, then they put the two empty sides together so it looked like a normal tree again. Then they stood it up in the same place where it had been growing and went home.

Next day, Nwapfundhla said to Nwafene, 'Let's take the girls and chop some wood'. So the two girls picked up the axes and followed them into the forest. Nwapfundhla walked in front and led them all towards the hollow tree. When it came in sight, he pointed it out to his girlfriend and said in a loud voice, which the others could not help overhearing, 'See that tree? That's the tree I want and I'm going to chop it down with my head.' Then little Nwapfundhla, very sure of himself, strutted up to the tree and gave it a light tap with his head. The hollow tree crashed to the ground in a heap of splintered wood.

Nwafene's girlfriend looked on in wide-eyed admiration and quickly Nwafene said, 'Of course, I taught him to do that. That's just the way I chop my wood, you know.' Then he looked around for a tree and the one he chose was a little bigger than Nwapfundhla's. After all, he was MUCH stronger than a mere hare – and unfortunately it was a leadwood tree.

'That's the tree I want,' he announced. 'You watch me chop it down with my head.' Nwafene approached the tree very confidently to within a few strides. Then he lowered his head and charged at great speed into it. C R A S H!

Never again would Nwafene try to prove himself stronger than Nwapfundhla

Shangani folk tales

The First Zebra

8mins. 9secs.

In the beginning when all was new on the Earth the animal all similar, none having special horns or colorful coats. The Creator was busy finishing off his great work and fashioned a multitude of horns sizes and shapes and coats of many types and colors. When he had finished He left them in a cave close to the shores of a great lake.

The Creator then sent a message to all the animals living on the grassy plains, that they should go to the cave the next morning and select the horns and coats they thought would suit them best. This caused a great flurry of excitement and anticipation and the animals were all eager to see what the Creator had made for them.

All, that is, except for Zebra, whose only cavern in life was food, in fact it was well known among the other animals that Zebra was a glutton. When all the other animals moved off towards the lake at first light, Zebra did not join them. If he was going to take such a long walk he was going to have a good breakfast of luscious grass and he could not see why all the other animals urged him to hurry along to the cave, Zebra muttered that he would follow on in due course, when he had finished his breakfast. This was done through a mouthful of grass, so the other animals left the ill-mannered Zebra in disgust.

Several hours later Zebra decided he had had his fill, and slowly sauntered off towards the lake, following a broad trail left by the other animals. As Zebra neared the lake, some of the animals were returning to the plains and Zebra amazed by their change in appearance. Elephant had chosen a rather drab gray coat, but set this off with a magnificent pair of ivory tusks. Lion had chosen a sleek dusky coat with a regal mane of long black hair. Sable had a glossy black coat and vicious sweeping curved horns.

One by one Zebra passed all the animals in their brand-new finery. Finally just as he was about to enter the cave, Zebra passed Rhinoceros. Unfortunately Rhino is very nearsighted; he had chosen a coat several sizes too large and it looked rather baggy on him. Also, he had chosen two horns that were not the same size and stuck them on his nose. All in all, Rhino looked rather odd but he seemed very pleased with himself.

When Zebra went into the cave the only coat left was a boldly striped black-and-white one and he could find no horns at all. After such a long walk Zebra was feeling quite hungry again so he quickly tried on the remaining coat. This strange black-and-white coat did fit very well and as his belly was rumbling he did not care that it looked different; nor did he mind that no horns were left over for him.

Meanwhile, back on the plains, all the other animals were admiring each other in their brand-new finery. When Zebra got back to the plains he ignored all the others and just put his head down and started chomping away at his lunch. The other animals soon noticed the startling black-and-white coat and so they greeted Zebra with jeers and laughter.

“Look at the greedy Zebra in his funny new coat and without any horns!” cried the Duiker scornfully. Soon all the other animals had taken up the chorus.

Zebra did not care. What did horns matter when all that really counted was plenty of tender green grass to eat whenever he wanted? To this day Zebra had not needed any horns, but he is always fat and glossy in his peculiar black-and-white coat.

When the hippo was hairy

Parting Shots

Unforgettable quotes on conservation and development.

“Nature is often hidden, sometimes overcome, never extinguished.”

Francis Bacon,

Essayist and philosopher, 1561-1626

“Revere the land of our fathers.”

Thomas Bullfinch,

1794-1867

“The sun, the moon and the stars would have disappeared long ago, had they been within reach of predatory humans.”

Havelock Ellis,

Essayist and psychologist, 1859-1939

“God has lent us the earth for our life. It is a great entail. It belongs as much to those who follow us as it does to us, and we have no right, by anything we may do or neglect to do, to involve them in unnecessary penalties, or to deprive them of the benefit which we have in our power to bequeath.

John Ruskin.

“One could not pluck a flower without troubling a star.”

Francis Thompson,

Poet, 1859-1907