

FORUM: Human Rights Commission

QUESTION OF: The question of force feeding girls in West Africa

SUBMITTED BY: African Union

CO-SUBMITTERS: New Zealand, Tunisia, Iraq, Azerbaijan, Malaysia, Kenya, Ireland, Cameroon, Sierra-Leone, Maldives, Equatorial Guinea, World Bank, Ukraine, Czech Republic, Greece, Romania, Mauritius, Solomon Islands, Cape Verde

HUMAN RIGHTS COUNCIL I,

Recognizing ‘force-feeding’ or ‘leblouh’, in the context of the issue at hand, as the practice of feeding excessive quantities of food and liquid to girls as young as five to nineteen in West Africa,

Keeping in mind such practice remained a tradition for several centuries, for the purpose of making girls look traditionally desirable or increasing their chances of marriage at a young age,

Noting with concern the prevalence of force-feeding in Mauritania, Niger, Uganda, Morocco, Sudan, and several other member states of the African Union (AU), predominantly in rural villages considering 7% and 75% of girls were victims of force-feeding in rural and city areas respectively,

Acknowledging the existence of fattening farms in such areas where young African girls are forcibly fed 14,000 to 16,000 calories a day and physically abused when refusing to obey, as well as that the perpetrators of such human rights violation are often the girls’ own mothers,

Alarmed by the severe health risks followed by the practice of force-feeding, which encompass heart disease, diabetes, hypertension, cancers, reproductive health issues, and decreased life expectancy,

Reaffirming the signing of the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples’ Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, alternatively known as the Maputo protocol, by 49 member states of the African Union in 2003,

Having considered the impediment of the execution of force-feeding prevention measures, where causes include the locals’ reluctance towards defying an inveterate tradition, lack of financial resources, local educational infrastructure, and opportunities for women’s empowerment and employment,

1. Calls for all member states of the African Union (AU), particularly in West Africa where the issue at concern is most pertinent, to promptly take legal action against the practice of force-feeding young girls by:
 - a) prohibiting the act of leblouh and child marriage,
 - b) ceasing the activity of all operating “fattening farms”, as well as the establishment of precise and feasible frameworks that will ensure none remain open, which may include:
 - i. penalizing persons involved in direct force-feeding or managing of the farms through amercements and confiscation of the right to private property,
 - ii. transforming government-seized fattening farms to extracurricular centers, health facilities for the rehabilitation of victims of force-feeding, or community halls to host events such as workshops and guest lecturers,
 - iii. publishing yearly progress reports on the execution of such regulations, as well as the suggestion of new or amended measures for the future;
2. Suggests an addition to or reform of the local education system in order to ensure that children from all socio-economic backgrounds receive a quality education that would allow them to make healthy decisions and secure a job to support themselves, through ways such as but not limited to:
 - a) increasing the mandatory minimum age of education in schools from 14 years to 16 years, with the additional requirement that students either receive a favorable report as per a government-set standard or obtain a Brevet d’Etudes du Premier Cycle diploma, such that

- the Middle Level of education is complete,
- b) ensuring schools adequately teach and enforce healthy lifestyles by ways such as but not limited to:
 - i. developing and implementing a mandatory physical education program into the curriculum, either in conjunction with the sciences or as a separate component, for the youth to learn about the harmful symptoms of overeating and how they can maintain good health,
 - ii. including a physical exercise component such as sports, gym or yoga, such that students are able to choose from a range of levels of exertion,
 - iii. creating, if not already present, a team of boys and a team of girls for sports such as football and athletics which require minimal facilities;
 - c) Granting financial support for families that cannot afford school supplies or canteen meals,
 - d) Providing opportunities for students to participate in extracurricular programs in their holidays such as but not limited to:
 - i. work experience and internships,
 - ii. religious camps,
 - iii. sports camps,
 - iv. art courses;
3. Further calls for the strengthened partnership between governments, local authorities, the AU, the Pan-African Women's Organization (PAWO), and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs), for the purpose of reaching marginalized populations which will allow the:
 - a) precise assessment of any persisting force-feeding activity in specific regions of the country, as a replacement of a vague nation-wide evaluation,
 - b) development of localized strategies appropriate to each region's circumstances, under a detailed analysis of the principal causes of the practice, such as:
 - i. the lack of educational institutions within an accessible distance,
 - ii. the lack of employment opportunities for women who have completed primary or secondary education,
 - iii. social constraints and pressure from family traditions,
 - c) monitoring of the measures mentioned in Clause 1 by third parties, such as the AU and CSOs, in order to ensure their proper implementation;
 4. Endorses the prioritization and further development of child protection measures in AU member states, as a means of safeguarding children from human rights violations as well as ensuring access to education, by:
 - a) reviewing the 2003 Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa, while ratifying the document if it has not been done yet,
 - b) adding a constitutional provision for free and compulsory primary, and if possible, secondary education to children, especially in Sub-Saharan African countries;
 5. Encourages the greater contribution of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) and CSOs, while working jointly with local authorities, to educate mainly rural population on the severe health risks of force-feeding, specifically through:
 - a) conducting informative sessions at schools or other available educational institutions accessible to the rural villagers, covering:
 - i. the health risks of obesity, exploitation of growth hormones and steroids, and detrimental psychological impacts on the children,
 - ii. how to follow and promote a healthy lifestyle, including nutritionally balanced diets and promotion of physical activities in daily life and for leisure,
 - b) promoting such messages through other means, such as public advertisements, campaigns, slogans, television, and social media platforms for regions with higher internet accessibility,
 - c) essentially highlighting that there are other means of "securing girls' future" than through

force-feeding, as well as the significance of women's empowerment in shifting the prevalent patriarchal culture in Africa;

6. Requests member states to actively promote women's empowerment, to increase their income and local business participation, as well as to reduce the likelihood of child marriages thus force-feeding, through:
 - a) revisiting the proposed actions indicated in the AU Strategy for Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment, particularly regarding the Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) section, to incorporate in localized frameworks as appropriate,
 - b) promoting women's rights to ownership and control over land, as guided by one of UN's Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to increase agricultural productivity,
 - c) organizing literacy workshop, business/entrepreneurship training, and leadership opportunities;

7. Encourages strengthening rural women's employment opportunities in the agricultural sector, in collaboration with the World Bank and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), by:
 - a) supporting rural institutions and small-scale farms by developing government policies and programs that aid self-employed agricultural occupations,
 - b) encouraging the use of environmentally sustainable agriculture and food production through soil enhancement, and cultivation techniques,
 - c) decreasing the cost of and improving access to information on land loans to encourage more women, especially youths to find employment in agricultural fields;

8. Underlines that inter or non-governmental agencies will assist with financial, material, and human resources required for the implementation of the above measures, which will comprise of:
 - a) the United Nations Office to the African Union (UNOAU) and the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR),
 - b) the AU, particularly operating as the moderator of equitable resource allocation to African nations.