



# **WOMEN OF THE HORN OF AFRICA, STILL BENDING THEIR HEADS**

## **A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE HORN OF AFRICA**

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*By: The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) Network*

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## A GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE HUMAN RIGHTS SITUATION OF WOMEN IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

*“Violence and repression of women has escalated across many Horn of Africa societies in recent years and is affecting not only women and girls well being, humanity and potential but it is also impacting on the women’s communities and the prospects of peace and democracy inside the Horn countries.”*

-HALA ALKARIB

### ABOUT SIHA

SIHA network is a coalition of civil society organizations and women’s groups that work for women’s rights and gender equality in Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Djibouti and Eritrea. SIHA works towards sustaining and supporting community activism for women in order to reconnect on a grassroots level and also to build the capacity of women and civil society organizations that work on women rights. Furthermore SIHA is always working towards seeking and rethinking new strategies to create larger constituencies for women’s rights among the communities across the Horn. The work of SIHA and its members across the Horn is built on integrating women rights into their societies and standing against legitimizing rights violations based on religion, culture, race or socioeconomic status. SIHA strongly believes that instituting women rights values is a core avenue towards restoring democracy and peace in the Horn of Africa.

SIHA’s constituency is comprised of 40 member organization and networks. Many of our members are working in isolated areas or in conflict zones around the region.

## ABOUT SIHA

The Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa is a coalition of civil society organizations and women’s groups that work for women rights and gender equality in Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Somalia, Somaliland, Ethiopia, Eritrea and Djibouti. SIHA is comprised of over 40 member organizations.



# INTRODUCTION

This overview by the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) Network will give a general perspective on the current human rights situation of women in the Horn of Africa. The ultimate purpose of this report is to explain that women rights are not an isolated area but are directly connected to the socio-economic and political environment, and are equal to the first generation of human rights.

Central to SIHA and its member's ethos is the realization that women's rights are human rights. This notion is fundamental and revolutionary. Nevertheless, because women traditionally have been relegated to the private sphere and to a subordinate status in society, they have generally been excluded from recognized definitions and interpretations of human rights. This particularly happens in regions like the Horn of Africa where these views are affecting both women in general and the work and well being of women activists and rights defenders. As Margaret Sekaggya, UN Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Right Defenders argued: "This lack of awareness about the status of women is emblematic of the lack of awareness of the legitimacy of women's rights in general."

## WOMEN IN THE HORN OF AFRICA

Women across the Horn of Africa are still bending their heads and suffering from destitution, famine, the destruction of their livelihoods and systemic violations of their rights. The women in the Horn are continuously carrying the burden of discriminatory aspects of traditional and customary laws and religious fundamentalism. Women's human identity and even existence is often compromised and threatened in countries around the Horn of Africa. The status of women in the Horn is in direct contrast to the articles, stipulations and principles of the Protocol of the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa and the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights.

Culturally and ethnically the Horn population shares a broad range of similarities. For centuries the region has witnessed continuous cycles of migration that have impacted the composition of its population and created extensive cultural and racial diversity. The most significant cultural marker that can be observed in the current Horn, in addition to its cycle of tribal and civil armed conflicts, is the large influence of Islamic extremism and militancy in comparison to other Muslim population across Africa.

During the 1960s and 70s, as in other parts of the world, the Horn of Africa was exposed to the influence of the global human rights and women rights movements. This was accompanied by a growing awareness of the rights and entitlement of women and the emergence of female activism that questioned and challenged society's traditional beliefs and practices relating to women and girls. The development of the women's movement and women's rights principles has taken various forms around the Horn countries depending on the state's ideology and its position towards the concept and practices

of women rights. The position of women in Horn societies has always been subject to the policies of the current ruling regimes.

This overview will reveal that many societal practices in the Horn are embedded in and justified by the concepts of tradition and religion. While violating women's human rights and even legitimizing violence against them, these concepts are crippling the women's as well as the communities' advancement. Research has revealed that societies with a high prevalence of violence against women are more susceptible to civil conflicts and have poor potential for development.

## SOMALIA

The victimization of women during the long lasting armed civil conflict has taken a new twist since the emergence of the religious militant group of Al Shabab. The group's ideology is centered on the repression of women, casting them as the cause of virtually all society's ills. Al Shabab has developed and applied through the past number of years a series of rules and laws inside the areas they control within south central Somalia. These rules mainly focus on the presence and appearance of women as they are forced to be fully covered from head to toe, and are allowed only a limited presence in public arena even in situations where a woman is trying to earn a living or is collecting firewood or fetch water. Women cannot interact with men. If they do, they are accused of adultery (*zina*) or prostitution and eventually they could be sentenced to death by stoning. Women are made to wear red socks during their menstrual cycle so their communities know that they are *Nejis* - meaning they are contaminated. These are only a few examples of the endless restrictions that reflect to what extent women are de-humanized inside Somalia, particularly in areas controlled by the militia. According to SIHA members in Somalia, women rights activists and their organizations have been the subjects of ongoing terror, and are often forced to leave the country or to continue with their work underground, subjecting themselves to serious risks.

On top of all that, Somalia has recently been exposed to severe famine. SIHA along with members in Somalia believe this disaster has been caused by human processes. It is a result of the long term abandonment of the region, in addition to the conflict and destruction of the communities' livelihoods.

According to Iniskoy, a SIHA member organization in Wajid Bokol in south central Somalia, women street vendors in Somalia are often subjected to violence and they are the most vulnerable victims of the Islamic militia who have labeled these women as being sexually permissive. Women street vendors are often exposed to charges of *Zina* (adultery) and sentenced to death by stoning or other brutal ways while these women are simply trying to earn a living.

On September 27, 2009 in Shangani district of Banadir region, a minority clan female street vendor named Saynab, aged 38, was killed after a member of the TFG. (the Transitional Federal Government), troops shot her following a dispute over payment of his debt.<sup>1</sup> The same source also reported that in August 2011, Al Shabab militia was forcing the IDPs (internally displaced people) to return to their original homes and villages despite the drought conditions. When the IDPs refused and told Al Shabab "we have nothing to go back to", Alshabab militia destroyed the IDP camp in Baidoa district and ordered

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<sup>1</sup> Report presented to SIHA by INISKROY on September 27, 2009.

the people to stand on their feet under the sun without movement from sunrise to sunset which resulted in the death of many of their children.

Somalia remains the open wound of the Horn of Africa, where severe human rights violations are regrettably becoming a part of daily life for civilians, women in particular. The situation is not improving despite the presence of the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM). The mission is struggling with great limitations when it comes to certain aspects of civilian and women protection. Besides, the mission's operational area is limited to specific geographical areas within the capital city, Mogadishu. The fact that the Somali region is undergoing severe armed civil conflicts is not a justification to abandon the regions civilian population. More efforts are needed by the human rights' communities in Africa and internationally to develop outreach strategies to support the women and the civilians trapped inside Somalia.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION**

- The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights should investigate the massive and collective rights violations of the Somali women and should address the Somali Transitional Federal Government (TFG) on their role on providing protection for women and set clear measures to ensure that women and girls are safe and not exposed to militant violence, crimes, and torture.
- The African Commission should urge AMISOM to emphasize elements of protection and support for women inside south central Somalia.
- The African Commission should lobby the African Union's countries on behalf of Somali women and their children, for access to food, safe drinking water, security, humanitarian support and protection.

### **SOMALILAND/NORTHERN SOMALIA**

With a population of 3.5 million people, Somaliland is facing both local and international problems of legitimacy. Somaliland has been restricted into a culturally homogeneous nation-state with the clan units serving as a basis for political and social mobilization and organization. The existing political conflict raises several issues which constrain women's political participation including the fact that identity for participation is defined by clan and religious affiliations and the legitimacy and authority of government over the national territory.

Women in Somaliland struggle with barriers caused by social and cultural perceptions in instances when they want to access the justice system, since traditional leaders often intervene to deal with the women's legal case rather than the court system. For instance, customary laws and practices remain discriminatory against women on issues such as property inheritance. There is also institutionalized violence against women e.g. wife battering, rape, female genital mutilation. Also the existence, side by side, of a multitude of statutory and customary laws that might be conflicting is a huge issue of concern. This dual legal system is due largely the dominance of the clan based system, but can also partly be attributed to the fact that Somaliland is not recognized as a state, and this makes it more challenging to put pressure on the government to adhere to regional and international standards.

Female genital mutilation remains widely practiced inside Somaliland, despite the best efforts of women rights activists. We are far from achieving any sort of progress as currently; more than 85% of girls are being mutilated.

The unrecognized territory is also struggling with carrying the burden of thousands of displaced people from other parts of the Somali region and, most recently, large numbers of Ethiopian migrants due to the Horn's devastating drought. Women represent over 80% of displaced and migrant population inside the Somaliland territory. There is no capacity, resources or internal legal framework to address the challenges of these groups.

### **RECOMMENDATION TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION**

- The African Commission is to observe the women conditions and access to justice inside the Somaliland territory including the IDP and migrant women with no access to protection and support.

## **SOUTH SUDAN**

The independence of South Sudan carries great opportunities for the South Sudanese people and gives hope for finally restoring human rights inside the long suffering country. Some positive trends in relation to women's rights have been observed over the past years and the 25% representation rule which was enshrined in the South Sudan Interim Constitution has resulted in women being present at all levels of state life; female literacy has increased with literacy among women aged 15-24 currently at about 28%,<sup>2</sup> and South Sudanese police officers have begun to receive special training on how to assist victims of gender-based violence.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, women in South Sudan are still falling between the cracks of the new country's emerging judiciary system. Members of SIHA inside South Sudan are advocating against the implications of the application of customary laws on women across South Sudan. SIHA have developed a research paper on the subject. Our research has revealed that for over 90% of women in South Sudan state, their only avenue to justice is through Customary courts. Although there are different laws which vary between the different tribes customs, the principles of these courts is traditional grounded in the concept of a patriarchal society, where women are perceived as part of their communities wealth. The dowry system in South Sudan still remains critical to livelihoods in a rapidly changing social and economic context. It provides a small window into a much larger social problem that seems to be getting worse. The escalating price of dowry is creating a scramble in some communities, with one expert suggesting that it has been the major contextual factor for the escalation of violence and conflict. In the first half of 2010 it was reported by the United Nations that 700 people had been killed and over 152,000 displaced as a result of conflicts over cattle.

<sup>2</sup> Southern Sudan Centre for Census, Statistics and Evaluation, "Key Indicators for Southern Sudan" 2011, Available at [http://ssccse.org/storage/key-indicators-for-southern-sudan/Key%20Indicators\\_A5\\_final.pdf](http://ssccse.org/storage/key-indicators-for-southern-sudan/Key%20Indicators_A5_final.pdf).

<sup>3</sup>UNFPA, "Working with Police in South Sudan to Assist Survivors of Gender-Based Violence" 20 January 2011 available at <http://www.unfpa.org/public/home/news/pid/7156>. Before the Comprehensive Peace Agreement it was estimated that about 343,000 children were enrolled in school. In 2010 the number was over 1.6 million. See UNICEF in South Sudan, July 2011 factsheet accessed August 2<sup>nd</sup> 2011 at [http://www.unicef.org/esaro/Children\\_in\\_South\\_Sudan\\_fact\\_sheets.pdf](http://www.unicef.org/esaro/Children_in_South_Sudan_fact_sheets.pdf).

## CUSTOMARY LAW IN SOUTH SUDAN

“Our families do not want to return the cows; they always stand against our will. There is no way to get rid of my husband without returning the dowry as it is our tradition. So we look for a man, to live with him until we are sure that the first husband will take us to the prison. But at least after that we can divorce.”

*Statement by one of the women in Rumbek prison interviewed by SIHA*

South Sudan’s customary laws permit divorce on a variety of grounds including, “repeated infidelity; neglect of family duties by either party; gross misconduct by the wife; impotence of the husband; physical cruelty; general breakdown of the marriage”<sup>4</sup> Although divorce is permitted in theory, maintenance of the marriage bond is heavily favored by both statutory and Customary authorities in practice. Even if divorce is granted, however, women may face a new set of problems. A 2005 study found that divorce in South Sudan is not only difficult to obtain but “puts women at greater risk due to economic and social vulnerability, and can result in the loss of child custody”, but the biggest risk is the long term imprisonment with no rights to appeal as a result of failing to repay the dowry.

Domestic violence was a pervasive feature of the lives described by the women with whom SIHA spoke during its research: it is embedded into the culture and attitudes towards women. In 2008 when a SIHA South Sudan member conducted a conversation with an official at the South Sudan justice department on the implication of domestic violence on women and society, his response was very clear: *“My mother was beaten, last week my sister was beaten by her husband what’s wrong with that?”*

Women in South Sudan are aware of their rights and entitlements, both at a grassroots level and among more educated women. Therefore the international and regional human rights communities have a great opportunity to extend hands of support to South Sudanese women during these transitional times

Human rights are the cornerstone of South Sudan’s new legal system. The Transitional Constitution enshrines an extensive Bill of Rights described as “a covenant between the people of South Sudan and their government at every level” and the “cornerstone of social justice, equality and democracy” from which no derogation can be made.<sup>5</sup> Human rights are no longer ideas which can be dismissed in South Sudan as impositions from the “outside”. In setting out the five definitional elements of the new state itself the Transitional constitution of South Sudan declares that “South Sudan is founded on justice, equality, respect for human dignity and advancement of human rights and fundamental freedoms.”<sup>6</sup> The rights enshrined in international human rights treaties ratified or acceded to South Sudan are considered integral to the Transitional Constitution’s Bill of Rights.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> World Vision International, “A study of customary law in contemporary South Sudan,” March 2004.

<sup>5</sup> See articles 9 and 10, TC. Derogation in situations of states of emergency is, however, provided for in article 189.

<sup>6</sup> Article 1 (5), Transitional Constitution.

<sup>7</sup> See Article 9 (3), Transitional Constitution

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION

- The African Commission should extend its support to the newly formed Government of South Sudan and urge them to sign and ratify the African Charter and the African Protocol on the Rights of Women in Africa.
- The African Commission is to demand the government of South Sudan take responsibility for protecting its female population.
- The African Commission is to investigate and develop recommendations on the situation of the women in South Sudan to the Government of South Sudan and urge the Government to address the situation of thousands of women suffering from imprisonment and poor access to justice.

## ETHIOPIA

Women in most sectors of Ethiopian society do not share equal rights with men and are generally considered to be not equals, but property. This is demonstrated by the high percentage of marriages by abduction. In some regions, such as the Oromo region it is as high as 60%. Girls are usually snatched while away from their villages, going to school or fetching water. This is usually followed by an arbitration process by village elders where families of the abducted girls are paid off with the bride price.

Ethiopian women and girls are suffering due to high levels human trafficking, particularly girls and women in the rural areas. These trafficked women and girls most typically end up serving as domestic laborers in Arab gulf countries and Lebanon, without any measures of protection or responsibility from the state because the Government of Ethiopia does not comply with the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking. This is resulting in thousands of Ethiopian women and underage girls being subjected to ill treatment and rights violations.

Although Ethiopia has one of the most developed and coherent domestic laws in relation to women's rights in the region, following the development of the Federal Family Law of 2000 and the revised criminal code of 2004, the integrity of the governing system always fails when it comes to the application of women's rights and in their commitment to the principles of social justice.

The efforts of Ethiopian women rights activists who are striving towards attaining social change are hindered by the restrictive civil society law which limits the abilities of women rights activists and their organizations. Advocacy and awareness work on women rights in Ethiopia is surrounded by great risks for activists who are often the subject of intimidation and ongoing threats.

## RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION

- The African Commission is to hold the Ethiopian government accountable on tackling women's rights matters beyond the narrative of legislations, taking into consideration the actual situation of women inside the country



- The African Commission should monitor and evaluate the availability of a solid policy framework and legal mechanisms to women victimized by traffickers and child prostitution networks.
- The African Commission should recognize the role of Ethiopian women rights defenders and the limitations and threats they suffer from as a result of a non conducive environment and address the matter with the Ethiopian government.

## **ERITREA**

The situation of women rights in Eritrea is a reflection of the failure of the Eritrean state to respect the human dignity of its people. According to SIHA members who have left Eritrea, large numbers of women are fleeing the country, hoping to escape the repression of the authorities. Many have lost their lives in the process of fleeing from their homeland; some of them have died in the Sahara desert whereas those who make it to the Mediterranean Sea or the Gulf of Aden often drown, and the whereabouts of many more remain unknown.

The participation of women in the Eritrean national military service is particularly subject to many issues and doubts. SIHA's associates have reported hundreds of women raising issues in relation to this. Regardless of the announcement stating the requirement is limited to an 18-month service, the reality proves otherwise, as the service seems to have no actual time limit and women need concrete reasons like marriage or pregnancy to be released of national service. Another issue for concern is complaints by female participants who have alleged abuse by government and/ or law enforcement officials. Many women have reported different kinds of abuse, ranging from being used as a personal servant by the officials to actually being forced to be involved in relationships with them. Those who refuse to entertain such offers have been victims of unfair treatment, transferred to remote areas or have missed out on some of the privileges and rights their colleagues have enjoyed. These issues have constantly been raised by SIHA's associates in Eritrea but continue to be unexplained and unaddressed.

The lives of many women have been disrupted and affected by the instability of the small country. Women have faced the challenge of increased, often unbearable responsibility, and in addition to the traditional role of women in the society many are forced to be the only bread winners for their families.

More and more Eritrean women are fleeing their country and are becoming the easy targets traffickers and subject to abuse and extortion by border police e.g. many of them have been imprisoned for illegally crossing borders or forced to live in refugee camps on the border between Sudan and Eritrea which lack basic services and where they are often exposed to systemic violence and all types of abuse from forced labor to sexual exploitation.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION**

- The African Commission should address the violations of the rights of women refugees fleeing Eritrea for neighboring countries and ensure that their rights are preserved and well protected and that they are not subjected to violence and sexual abuse by the host countries' authorities.
- The African Commission should investigate the violations against women in Eritrea and ensure that these violations are addressed with the Eritrean regime as well as at the regional platforms.

## SUDAN

Sudan is heading towards fundamental changes. The demography and geography of what was once the biggest country in Africa is changing and several political and societal conflicts are occurring simultaneously. Most notably, the independence of South Sudan has been the greatest geographical change to the country but several civil conflicts have also erupted across the state, mainly in the shared borders with South Sudan namely South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, this in addition to the continuous conflict inside the Darfur region.

This situation not only reflects that Sudan's peace and stability cannot be solved solely by independence for South Sudan but it relates directly to the country's governance system and the influence of the ruling regime. Unclear stipulations and practices are emerging in areas such as citizenship and ethnic identity. Regional and international actors are focusing only on the political process whereas social and cultural issues such as gender and race identities are presenting major challenges and affecting the peace and security of Sudanese women.

The Sudanese regime is using South Sudan's recent independence as a front for removing citizenship for those it sees as being undesirable. These processes are specifically affecting poor women from conflict zones.

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*R, as a student entering university, is obligated to apply for her national ID. The first question was about her ethnic and tribal origin. After explaining her tribal background, she was called a liar and based solely on assumptions about her physical appearance the officer at the national ID office decided that she was originally from South Sudan and therefore not entitled to Sudanese citizenship. R is still struggling to formally prove her Sudanese identity which is a requirement to receive an education.*

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Thousands of Sudanese, women in particular, are being forced to undergo a difficult process of trying to prove their identity. This is in line with the recent claims of the Sudanese regime that the session of South Sudan has ended ethnic and tribal diversity of the country. It's always known that Sudan population is a mix of the Horn and Sub-Saharan Africa. Historically like many other African/Horn of Africa countries Sudan is bound by complex racial and ethnic links to all its African Neighbors.

The women in Sudan are struggling through the multiple layers of systemic discrimination and exclusion based on gender, race, physical appearance and dress codes, supported by legal proceedings and articles that openly violate the rights of women and threaten their well being and existence.

Despite the country's regional and international obligations, Sudan's domestic laws in relation to aspects of women rights have never reflected the responsibilities outline in the country's current interim constitution. Sudan's domestic laws and law enforcement practices have largely reflected institutional gender discrimination, which has caused great suffering to Sudanese women and girls.

The Sudan Public Order Regime (POR)<sup>8</sup> is a set of laws that are particularly infused with a conception of women as problematic actors whose movements and presence in public and private life must be subject to the highest scrutiny lest their inherent “dangerousness” infect those around them. As a result of this pervading attitude, even where provisions of the POR are not expressed in gender-specific terms, women are easy targets for the application of ill-defined moral standards which have been bestowed with legal characteristics.

This law has been instrumental in approaching IDPs women and communities. The women of the urban poor /IDPs camps around sizable central cities and large numbers of women from different IDP communities who are striving to survive as sellers of food, tea, coffee and brewing local alcohol, remain the target of the public order police systemically for over the past twenty years. Women are lashed and jailed for lengthy periods of time and often tortured and sexually harassed.<sup>9</sup> One of the most striking features of the Khartoum Public Order Law is the general and vaguely worded final penalty provision which provides that “in the case of any contravention of this Act” a person may be punished by a variety of criminal penalties including imprisonment, fine, confiscation of goods and lashing (section 26). The acts which might constitute “contraventions” of the law are not clearly defined—indeed many of the provisions in the Act regulate matters usually governed by civil/administrative and not criminal law e.g., the licensing of businesses.

The Sudanese government has not presently taken any measures to address the limitations of the Sudan sexual violence legislation. According to the Criminal Law Reform in Sudan by Redress and Sudan Organization for Research and Development (SORD); criminal laws are often overly broad and vague and criminalize conduct that is protected by such rights as the freedom of expression. A range of offences are subject to whipping and other cruel and inhuman punishment. The law fails to protect the most vulnerable from crimes such as rape or torture, which frequently go unpunished. Persons detained are by law not provided with adequate safeguards, which exposes them to violations in custody.

Furthermore, based on SIHA research, Sudan cities and urban centers are witnessing an increase in activity of public order laws policing against women. This of course is a reflection of the rising political tensions in the country. Women in Sudan are trapped between striving with the impact of conflict and the repressive laws and the regional and international actors who are narrowly focusing on the political process and the geopolitical changes without seeing the effects on the women and the civilians.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION**

- The African Commission should address and investigate the access to citizenship for the women of Sudan, particularly the marginalized and poor women and women displaced from conflict zones of Darfur South Kordofan, Abyei and Blue Nile.
- The African Commission should address and stress demanded the urgency of amending the Sudan criminal Act of 1991, and ensures that a new act is in place to guarantee women safety and protection from sexual violence where priorities are criminalized. Sudan should also introduce a new set of laws that enhance accountability of Government officials and victims’ rights to fair trials. The African Commission should observe and address the impact of Sudan’s

<sup>8</sup> SIHA beyond Trouser paper – November 200 [http://sihanet.org/index.php?option=com\\_docman&Itemid=6](http://sihanet.org/index.php?option=com_docman&Itemid=6)

<sup>9</sup> See sections 5 – 7, 9, 20, 13 - 17, 10 and 24 of the Khartoum Public Order Act

discriminatory laws, particularly Sudan's public order laws, on Sudanese women and their well being.

- The African Commission should address the brutality of Sudan public order police and the recorded case of violations of women and girls who have been victimized by the Sudan public order courts, by calling on Sudan to abolish the practice of lashing women and also the kidnapping of women and girls who are taken against their will to public order police stations and courts.
- The African Commission should urge the Sudanese government to ratify the African Protocol on the Rights of Women and to amend its domestic laws and internal polices so that they are in line with the country's regional and international obligations.

## **DJIBOUTI**

Despite the small the population of Djibouti (approximately 864,000 people<sup>10</sup>) it is the only Horn of Africa country which has signed and ratified all international and regional agreements in relations to women rights. Furthermore, since 2003 after the drafting and approval of the Djiboutian family law, the country became one of the few predominantly Muslim countries to observe the rights of women in their domestic laws yet still maintain an Islamic Sharia framework.

On the other hand according to SIHA's research, the illiteracy rates among women in the country exceed 50%. This is in addition to other challenges that the Djiboutian women are facing e.g. poverty which is posing the one of the most serious challenges to women particularly the Afar minority women and the small nomadic population of Djibouti .

Djibouti is the destination of thousands of Somali and Ethiopian women entering the country as refugees and the heavy presence of the foreign military bases encourages sex industry and the sexual exploitation of these women.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS TO THE AFRICAN COMMISSION**

1. The African Commission should observe the situation of the minority women inside Djibouti and their access to services and education
2. The African Commission should observe and engage with the Government of Djibouti and UNHCR on matters of sexual exploitation of refugee women from the Horn and to demand the development of protection polices and strategies.

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<sup>10</sup> World Bank 2009



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