

The Karina Declaration: An important common platform for positioning women's role in governance <https://reliefweb.int/report/sierra-leone/karina-declaration-important-common-platform-positioning-women-s-role-governance>

The Karina Declaration: An important common platform for positioning women's role in governance

*By the [UN Country Team in Sierra Leone](#)*

Women's political participation calls for a much more robust approach that will not only make women's voices heard but also strategically position women in political leadership and public decision-making roles.

Over sixty women assembled in the City Council Hall of Kamakuwie in Karenta Bombali District in the northern province of Sierra Leone on 7th October 2017, six months prior to the 2018 general elections in Sierra Leone. It was the first time UN Women succeeded in establishing a common platform for women-led civil society organizations in order to advance women's political participation. This was particularly necessary and historical in the light of women's shrinking presence in political parties. There was a need to strengthen civil society women's advocacy and lobby in positioning women's voice and agency. The need for a safe space for women in the electoral cycle and particularly during the general elections was more pronounced. Women's organizations and aspiring female candidates needed to strategize on how to create an enabling environment for women as election candidates as well as women voters. The UN Women Country Office in Sierra Leone established a Common Platform that engaged a number of women-led CSOs (including the 50/50 Group, the Mano River Women Peace Network (MAWOPNET), Campaign for Good Governance, Women's Forum and many others. This Common Platform became vital for resource mobilization, in addition to energizing the women's movement. UN Women mobilized financial resources, which contributed towards strengthening women's voice and agency in peace building. UN Women developed the project, Women, Peace and Security, with thanks to funding from the Peace Building Fund (PBF). On this platform, a number of post-election interventions have continued to be built.

It was here that the Karina Declaration was generated. The Karina Declaration states that the Sierra Leone's Women's Movement will work together in sisterhood with a shared vision that goes beyond political party lines, to achieve equitable women's political representation in public

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decision-making processes. The declaration also agreed that the Sierra Leone Women's Movement must continue to strengthen and link with grass-roots women's movements in solidifying GEWE and in increasing the critical mass of empowered women, girls, men and boys.

From 30 May– 2 June 2018, the campaign for good governance with support from UN Women and through the PBF, engaged women in Kenema and Bo, to share their experiences and reflections on elections conflicts mediations and non-violence that could help make a change for the 2023 elections. About 68 women were converged, testimonies were heard and presentations made by various groups.

Ammie Lebbie is a school teacher and female activist invited by the 50/50 Group to talk to 34 women from different political parties and groups. She pointed out that for women to make an impact in elections they must stand together as one with confidence and determination, demonstrating solidarity, resilience, and fortitude. She re-emphasized the importance of self-confidence and efforts to relinquish fear as eagles in the sky and elephant in the forest. Many issues affect women from supporting one another such as jealousy among women, lack of self-confidence, lack of education and skills, dependence on their husbands and low self-esteem. She added that women can make it if they change their mind set, as when a woman survives many other survives, but when a man survives very few survives. The impetus to actualize women's position in leadership and power is harnessed with the great expectation of more women in politics taking decision-making roles. Ammie Lebbie served as an inspiration to the seated women who listened to her.

Josephine H Gandhi giving her contribution to the violence perpetuated against women before, during and after Sierra Leones March 2018 elections said a woman was beaten by nine men because of her political association. "There was no political will and instructions from above is a slogan which is well known to create pandemonium and marginalize human rights. A renown politician gave orders to beat up Easter Pendema, a local business woman, even when she was admitted in hospital from the injuries she encountered, there was an unsuccessful attempt on her life. All efforts to enforce the law failed and Sheku Silla who instructed the attack was very influential so even though the evidences were there the case was just ignored, the police could not do anything. She also went on to say that a young girl of 15 was gang raped in Pendembu in the

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East of Sierra Leone and that the autopsy results showed that she died of liver damage. No action was taken to investigate and bring the rapist to justice.” Josephine called on all women's group and organizations to look in to the women's manifesto and increase its relevance for more inclusion of women in governance.

Many women gave heartfelt experiences on intimidation and violence serving as lessons learnt. As dialogue turns in to action plans to better position women in governance, women's empowerment has never been more relevant and timely, it's time to influence a positive policy environment for women's equal representation in positions of trust, and yield greater national development.