



# World symposium on masculinities and gender equality concludes in Kigali, Rwanda

**PRESS RELEASE - for immediate release**

**7-months of dialogue conclude with call for ‘men’s engagement’ work to support feminist systems change agenda**

A global symposium on advancing gender equality through transforming patriarchal masculinities and working with men and boys concluded in Kigali on 22 June 2021.

Known as the *MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium*, the event was the 3rd Global Symposium of MenEngage Alliance – a global civil society network working to transform masculinities and engage men and boys in women’s rights, gender justice, human rights, racial justice, LGBTQI rights, climate justice and other interconnected social justice issues.

The MenEngage Ubuntu symposium saw 5,000 participants take part in more than 300 hours of discussion over seven months. More than 600 speakers and panelists joined from grassroots activists, researchers, students, civil society actors, development partners,

governments, policymakers, and businesses. Altogether, they took part in more than 180 sessions at regional, country, and global levels around the world.

**The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium was informed by the themes of Feminisms, Accountability, Intersectionality, Transformation and Power-with.** It aimed to apply these themes throughout to a range of issues including: gender-based violence prevention; racial justice; LGBTQI rights; climate and environmental justice; economic justice; sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR); peace and security; equitable caregiving and fatherhood; and many other interrelated issues. The discussions held at the Ubuntu Symposium have further consolidated the importance of engaging men and boys on addressing, challenging, dismantling and tackling these issues.

‘Ubuntu’ was collectively chosen as the name of the event in recognition of the shared sense of compassion, responsibility, and humanity for all. Often translated as “humanity towards others” or “I am because you are”, Ubuntu is a Nguni Bantu term from Southern Africa that represents the universal connection between every person. The symposium co-organisers seek to honor this wisdom, and build with it in full recognition of its origins, roots, traditions and thought-leadership arising from the African continent in which the symposium was rooted.

Co-hosted in Rwanda, the event took on a hybrid online/offline and longer-term format following the COVID-19 pandemic. The event was co-organized by MenEngage Alliance, Rwanda Men’s Resource Centre (RWAMREC), the Rwanda MenEngage Network (RWAMNET), MenEngage Africa, and the Rwandan Ministry of Gender and Family Promotion (MIGEPROF).

**The symposium concluded on 22 June 2021 with a 4-hour Closing Ceremony held in Kigali, Rwanda, with hundreds of participants joining in-person and online around the world.** The proceedings saw the unveiling of the [Ubuntu Declaration and Call to Action](#) – a bold new set of commitments co-developed through the MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium. It calls for advancing the political agenda for those who work with men and boys for gender justice - including NGOs, INGOs, Research Institutions, Networks, Campaigns, UN Agencies, Governments, Donors, Multilateral Agencies, Private sector, Media, MenEngage Alliance members, and all institutions and individuals involved or planning to be involved in this work.

The *Ubuntu Declaration and Call to Action* reflects a deepened acknowledgement, solidarity and commitment towards a systems change agenda, which has long been advocated by

intersectional feminist voices, organisations, and leaders. It also centers values and practices of accountability, decolonisation, intergenerational dialogue, allyship, and inner work for social change.

Bafana Khumalo, co-chair of MenEngage Alliance, and Co-Executive Director at Sonke Gender Justice, said: "The Ubuntu Declaration and Call to Action is a significant development for all who work to challenge patriarchal norms and values around masculinities, as well as those engaging with men and boys for gender equality. Intersectional feminist voices have been leading the way when it comes to the stark truth that current systems of economics, politics, healthcare are not working. These systems are failing humanity, and especially those on the margins of the margins. This urgently needs to change and the symposium was a strong call to support this through a feminist systems transformation agenda. The Ubuntu Declaration aims to center this transformative agenda for a future based on sustainability, equitability, justice, and peace."

Bafana's fellow co-chair, and White Ribbon Canada Executive Director, Humberto Carolo added: "The symposium has pushed forward our shared political vision for our work. It has set directions and ways forward for strengthening the agenda of the work to 'transform masculinities and engage men and boys' in advancing women's rights, LGBTQI rights, and gender and social justice. Importantly, it has emphasised the importance of working together - not only from a single-issue approach, but in solidarity with our partners across social justice movements. Now it is time to act and build on these commitments."

Honnete Isimbi, outgoing chairperson of the Rwanda MenEngage Network (RWAMNET), said: "The scale and depth of the symposium has been far greater than we could have imagined when we began the planning process in 2018. There is so much to process, consolidate, and take forward from this global mobilization. This will take time and the continued passion and energy of all of us over the months and years ahead. The Ubuntu Symposium has inspired us all - as Rwanda MenEngage Network, at the continental level, and as part of a global network - with the power of transnational solidarity and network-building. It has shown us that people can do this when they own the process and discussions."

The MenEngage Ubuntu Symposium was organised with the generous support of: Sida, UN Women, Prevention+, Amplify Change, UNFPA, Imbutu Foundation, Care, Oxfam, Embassy of Sweden Kigali, Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation.

### **For further information**

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### **About MenEngage Alliance**

MenEngage Alliance is an international social change network of civil society organisations and individuals coming together to understand, challenge, and transform patriarchal masculinities. This includes addressing the ways that ideas, norms and values around being a man relate to a range of interconnected issues. Members of MenEngage Alliance collaborate towards joint actions, and voice our collective solidarity on critical gender justice issues for a world where all people are equal and free from discrimination.

### **About MenEngage Africa**

MenEngage Africa (MEA) is part of the global MenEngage Alliance, and is made up of 22 country networks spread across East, South, West and Central Africa, with over 300 non-governmental organizations at grass-root, national and regional levels. MEA members work collectively toward advancing gender justice, human rights and social justice in key thematic areas including Sexual Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR), gender-based violence (GBV) & HIV prevention, Child Rights and Positive Parenting and in promoting peace on the continent.

### **About the Rwanda MenEngage Network (RWAMNET)**

RWAMNET is a network of 26 organizations working to promote male engagement in development programs including gender equality, human rights & GBV prevention, health programs, women's empowerment and others in Rwanda. RWAMNET is chaired by a steering committee made of six Organizations; and RWAMREC is the fiscal Organization that coordinates RWAMNET as the secretariat.

### **About the Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC)**

The Rwanda Men's Resource Centre (RWAMREC) is a non-governmental organization working to promote gender equality, positive masculinities and engaging men to eliminate all forms of men's violence against women and children. RWAMREC was founded in 2006 and was legally registered in 2008 by the Ministerial Order No. 114/11 of 3/9/2008. The Organization was

formed as a response aimed at seeing men become part of the solution and efforts in ending men's violent behavior. Since inception, the Organization has been working to change masculinity norms of men and boys to become positive and supportive partners in promoting gender equality in Rwanda.