

Joint Alternative Report on the Human Rights Situations of Women with Albinism in Benin to the 89th Session of the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW Committee)

By



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A. Introduction

There are credible accounts of human rights violations in Benin, including Lack of investigation and accountability for gender-based violence, including domestic and intimate partner violence, sexual violence, and child, early, and forced marriage;¹

According to a report by the U.S. Department of State, NGOs focused on the protection of persons with albinism reported societal discrimination and abuses, including infanticide of children with albinism, organ trafficking, and inadequate health services.² Women are at a higher risk of experiencing such violations. This risk is further compounded for women impacted by albinism.

This report aims to provide the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) with information on human rights violations targeting women with albinism in Benin. It has been compiled by the Africa Albinism Network in collaboration with albinism advocacy groups in Benin, including Divine Connexion Worldwide and ONG Valeurs Albinos.

B. Status of women in Benin with reference to the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women

Article 5: Elimination of stereotypes and discriminatory sociocultural behaviour

¹ US Department of State: 2023 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices: Benin. <https://www.state.gov/reports/2023-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/benin#:~:text=NGOs%20focused%20on%20protection%20of,trafficking%2C%20and%20inadequate%20health%20services.>

² As above

According to the fifth periodic report by Benin to CEDAW, Beninese laws prohibit all forms of discrimination against women. However, albinism groups in the country report that women with albinism in particular and persons with albinism in general face various forms of discrimination due to their albinism. A report by the US Department of State indicates that the constitution of Benin provided for women's equality in political, economic, and social spheres; however, women experienced extensive discrimination in obtaining employment, credit, equal pay, and owning or managing businesses. The report further stated that there were legal restrictions on employment of women, including limitations on the occupations in which women were allowed to work.³

Albinism groups in Benin have also reported numerous incidents of discrimination against women with albinism in various areas, including marriage, employment, and education. A notable example of discrimination as narrated by a woman with albinism

*"I recently experienced discrimination at a birthday party. A man showed interest in me, but his aunt disapproved and kept trying to signal him to stay away. He didn't understand her intentions and kept insisting on getting to know me. Frustrated, his aunt finally spoke up loudly in the Fonje language, saying, "These people are causing problems. I don't want that for you." Her words were hurtful and shocking, and the entire room fell silent, stunned by her blatant prejudice."*⁴

During the session of the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, delegates from Benin informed the committee that there had been three court cases involving violence and discrimination against

³ US Department of State (n1 above)

⁴ Story curled from inputs received from Divine Connexion Worldwide

people with albinism, one of which resulted in a life sentence currently being served. Additionally, they reported a case of a young girl with albinism who was abducted and disappeared but was later found by the police.⁵

These incidents and court cases underscore the severe human rights violations and various forms of violence experienced by persons with albinism, particularly women with albinism, in Benin. They highlight the urgent need for stronger legal protections and social interventions to address the discrimination and violence faced by this vulnerable group.

Article 10: Equal rights to education and vocational training

Women with albinism in Benin face multiple barriers in accessing quality education and training opportunities due to a combination of discrimination, inadequate accommodations, and specific health challenges. For instance, a girl with albinism was assaulted by one of her colleagues at school who snatched her bread and threw it away and said, "You fetish, what are you doing here among us".⁶

Women with albinism often struggle with sight problems and an inability to tolerate sun exposure, which significantly impacts their ability to participate in educational activities. Despite these challenges, no reasonable accommodations are made in the classroom, apart from occasionally being allowed to sit at the front. Teachers and students frequently complain when they attempt to approach the chalkboard to read what is written, further marginalizing them.

⁵ <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2022/08/experts-committee-elimination-racial-discrimination-commend-benin-national>

⁶ Story curled from inputs received from ONG Valeur Albinos

In addition to the physical barriers, women with albinism face constant discrimination, bullying, and mockery from both teachers and peers. This hostile environment often deters them from fully engaging in their education, resulting in poor academic performance and lower self-esteem. Moreover, they are excluded from participating in sports and other outdoor activities, as these are typically organized under the sun, which they cannot be exposed to in extended periods without protective gears or sunscreen.

The lack of reasonable accommodations extends to specific subjects as well. For example, women with albinism report struggling with geometry due to their low vision, and no support of visual aid is provided to help them understand in class sessions. Those who pursue vocational training programs are also forced to adapt without any provisions to accommodate their unique needs, limiting their ability to fully benefit from such opportunities.

These barriers highlight the urgent need for tailored interventions and accommodations to ensure that women with albinism have equal access to education and training, as stipulated in Article 10 of CEDAW.

Article 11: Equal access to work

Article 11 of CEDAW guarantees women's rights to employment and equal opportunities in the workplace. However, for women with albinism in Benin, securing employment remains a significant challenge due to persistent discrimination. For example, a person with albinism narrated, "I worked as a teacher in a school where, due to my condition of albinism,

some individuals were determined to have me removed. They made every effort to push me out of my position, ultimately leading to my resignation.”⁷

In general, people with albinism face substantial obstacles to socioeconomic integration, and these challenges are even more pronounced for women with albinism. For example, a young lady with albinism was initially denied a teaching position at a school, with the justification that his visual impairment was a barrier—an excuse that was clearly a pretext for discrimination. It was only after intervention by an albinism advocacy group that he was hired, and he later received commendations for his exceptional performance.⁸

Similarly, another beneficiary of an albinism group could only secure a position with the African Development Bank (ADB) after an advocacy intervention on his behalf, highlighting the additional support often required for individuals with albinism to access employment opportunities. These cases underscore the pervasive barriers to employment faced by persons with albinism, particularly women, who must contend with compounded layers of discrimination in their pursuit of economic independence and professional growth.

Article 12: Equality in health care

Article 12 of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) calls for the elimination of discrimination against women in the field of healthcare and guarantees equal access to healthcare services, including those related to family planning and reproductive health. However, the fifth periodic report of

⁷ Story curled from inputs received from Divine Connexion Worldwide

⁸ Story curled from inputs received from ONG Valeur Albinos

Benin highlights significant gender inequalities in access to healthcare and health services. The report identifies key areas where these inequalities are most pronounced: access to health services, birth control, reproductive health, HIV/AIDS, and malaria prevention and treatment.⁹

For women with albinism, these challenges are even more severe. Due to the historical and persistent discrimination and stigmatisation they face in accessing social services, including healthcare, women with albinism are at an even greater disadvantage. Albinism advocacy groups in Benin have reported that skin cancer remains a critical health concern for persons with albinism,¹⁰ as is the case across many parts of Africa. However, the availability of healthcare services to address the specific needs of persons with albinism, such as skin cancer treatment and access to sunscreen, remains extremely limited.

Additionally, anecdotal evidence from persons with albinism in Benin suggests that healthcare professionals often lack the necessary knowledge and training to adequately address the unique health challenges faced by persons with albinism. This gap in understanding can lead to inadequate care and further marginalization. Consequently, women with albinism face a compounded risk of poor health outcomes due to the intersection of gender discrimination and the stigma associated with albinism, making it crucial to address their specific healthcare needs under the framework of CEDAW.

Article 16: Marriage and family life

⁹ Fifth periodic report submitted by Benin under article 18 of the Convention, due in 2017

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRjhnzCVc00>

Women with albinism in Benin continue to face severe discrimination and human rights violations, particularly in relation to family and marriage. A recent case from August 2024 highlights the challenges faced by a young woman with albinism, thirty years old and widowed a year and half ago. . Since his death, she has faced ongoing discrimination from her late husband's family, who have unfairly blamed her for his passing due to her albinism.

Her in-laws forcibly took her two young children away from her and subjected them to mistreatment. When She demanded the return of her children due to the abuse they were facing, she was met with insults, threats, and hostility. When she persisted in seeking custody of her children, she was threatened with death. As a result, she was forced to file a complaint with the Cotonou police station, reporting the threats and requesting custody of her children.¹¹

According to reports from albinism groups in Benin, a woman who gave birth to twins with albinism was immediately divorced by her husband solely because their children were born with albinism. This case illustrates the harsh discrimination and social stigma that women impacted by albinism often endure in Benin.¹²

These cases exemplify the severe violations of these rights faced by women with albinism in Benin. They underscore the urgent need for measures to protect women with albinism from discrimination and ensure their rights under Article 16 of CEDAW are respected. They also highlight the broader issues of social stigma, harmful cultural beliefs, and practices

¹¹ Story curled from inputs received from ONG Valeur Albinos

¹² Story curled from inputs received from Divine Connexion Worldwide

and limited legal protections that continue to undermine the rights of women with albinism in Benin.

C. Conclusion and Recommendations

This report highlighted the significant challenges faced by women with albinism in Benin, including widespread discrimination in education, employment, healthcare, and within their communities. Despite existing legal frameworks aimed at protecting the rights of women, the unique vulnerabilities of women with albinism are often overlooked especially due to their unique colouring, disabilities and the harmful stereotypes attached to these, exacerbating their marginalization. Discriminatory practices, inadequate accommodations, and lack of targeted measures have created barriers that impede their access to basic rights and opportunities.

To uphold the principles of CEDAW, Benin must take decisive steps to address the specific needs of women with albinism. The following recommendations outline strategic actions to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and ensure the full realization of the rights of women with albinism in Benin.

Recommendations

- 1. Adopt and Implement the AU Plan of Action on Albinism through a National Action Plan for Persons with Albinism with a Dedicated Budget.**

The Government of Benin should adopt the African Union (AU) Plan of Action on Albinism¹³ and develop a National Action Plan specifically

¹³ [African Union Plan of Action to End Attacks and Other Human Rights Violations Against Persons with Albinism in Africa \(2021-2031\)](#)

targeting persons with albinism. This plan should include a dedicated budget to support implementation, monitoring, and evaluation. The National Action Plan must outline specific measures to combat discrimination, improve access to healthcare, education, and social services, and raise public awareness about albinism to reduce stigma.

2. Enact and Enforce Anti-Discrimination Measures and Strategies Addressing Specific Issues Faced by Women with Albinism.

The Government should collect sufficient data on people with albinism, including women (using the Washington set that shows how to include persons with albinism), and on that basis, enact comprehensive anti-discrimination laws and policies that specifically address the rights of women with albinism. These laws should include provisions to protect against discrimination on the basis of colour and disability in employment, education, healthcare, and social services. Enforcement mechanisms should be strengthened to ensure that violations are effectively addressed and that women with albinism have access to legal recourse and support services.

3. Ensure Inclusive Education by Providing Reasonable Accommodations and Targeted Support for Students with Albinism Since Persons with Albinism Are Persons with Disabilities.

The Ministry of Education should develop policies to ensure inclusive education for women and girls with albinism, including the provision of reasonable accommodations such as assistive devices for low vision common in albinism, accessible learning materials, and training for

teachers on albinism-specific needs. Schools should be mandated to create supportive environments that address the visual and social challenges faced by students with albinism, including measures to combat bullying and discrimination.

4. Improve Access to Health Services for Women with Albinism through Training, Policy Reform, and Provision of Specialized Care.

The Ministry of Health should integrate the specific health needs of women with albinism into national health policies. This includes training healthcare professionals on the unique challenges faced by persons with albinism, improving access to skin cancer prevention and treatment, and ensuring the availability of sunscreens and protective gear. Special attention should be given to reproductive health services, with a focus on providing tailored care that respects the rights and dignity of women with albinism.

5. Ensure Equal Access to Employment Opportunities and Workplace Protections for Women with Albinism.

The Ministry of Labor should work to eliminate employment discrimination against women with albinism by enforcing anti-discrimination policies in hiring, workplace accommodations, and promotions. Employers should be educated on the capabilities of women with albinism and encouraged to provide inclusive work environments that address visual impairments and other specific needs.

6. Promote Equal Rights in Marriage and Family Life for Women with Albinism.

The Government should develop and enforce concrete measures that protect the rights of women with albinism in marriage and family life, addressing discrimination, forced separation, and domestic violence. Legal frameworks should be strengthened to support women with albinism who face threats or abuse within their families, including access to legal aid, custody rights, and protective measures. Awareness campaigns should also be conducted to change societal attitudes and promote equal treatment in family settings.

These recommendations aim to foster an inclusive and supportive environment for women with albinism in Benin, ensuring their rights are respected, protected, and fulfilled in accordance with CEDAW.