

African Trans Feminist Charter

Introduction by L. LEIGH ANN VAN DER MERWE

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The African Trans Feminist Charter is crafted as an act of resistance and resilience, and mostly to position African trans women within feminist discourse on the continent and globally. We take a stand against exclusion of any kind and while we acknowledge that transgender women are often seen as enjoying some form of privilege, it is not true for every transgender woman. Intersectional factors like race, class and privilege, shape the realities of transgender women all over the African continent, and all over the world.

This document set forth the principles by which we engage with other groups of women in order to insert our voice in different spaces and linking our issue to a broader women's and feminist agenda. The idea for an African Trans Feminist Charter was born from the number of challenges facing African transgender women, including many different manifestations of violence. The history of the African transgender "movement" is that transgender persons on the masculine gender spectrum were leading the movement, including many different advocacy processes. Transgender women started organising themselves in 2010 and formed Social, Health and Empowerment Feminist Collective of Transgender Women of Africa as a feminist formation geared at crafting and advancing a feminist agenda for transgender women in Africa.

Social, Health and Empowerment has been involved in different feminist advocacy to ensure the inclusion of transgender women's voices, and we continue to include our voice and issues in feminist discourse and spaces.

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We, the transgender women of Africa, who also identify ourselves as feminists, have united to draft a charter on transgender women's positioning and framing of a feminist agenda on the African continent.

We shall consider this document to be an official charter of African transgender women and our position on our own socio-cultural, political and economic context.

The charter shall elaborate on why we seek to position ourselves as African feminists and why it is critical for us to do so at this time.

The charter shall give guidance on regional advocacy priorities and engaging strategic spaces and/or people in our struggle to have our issues recognized as women's issues and the employment of a feminist framework to do our advocacy.

This framework is developed from a strong human rights approach to address the issues affecting transgender women on the African continent.

Our work as African trans feminists is built on the following values:

- Embracing diversity
- Cooperation
- Transparency
- Inclusivity
- Respect
- Dignity
- Openness
- Support
- Integrity
- Commitment
- Creativity
- Loyalty
- Acceptance
- Excellence
- Empathy
- Professionalism

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The values, principles and behaviors of feminists are there to be a voice for all transwomen in Africa challenging sexist and discriminatory ways of operating. We are modelling feminist practice and we will be working with methods that are consistent with our politics and acknowledge transwomen's multiple roles. This is a space where one can respectfully challenge transwomen experience, support transwomen to identify their strength, value and nurture themselves and support transwomen's rights and decisions to determine how they live their lives.

We will safely challenge behavior that restricts transwomen's ability to take control over their lives. Working with important tools like professionalism,

integrity and commitment to strengthen the power of transwomen and use effective forms of communications. We are embracing diversity and we stand in solidarity with other women. We promote transparency in both action and intention.

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The charter will encourage the development of a feminist analysis of power in the face of hate legislation targeting sexual and gender minorities on the continent, and to gain an understanding of the impact of legal impediments on the lives of African transwomen.

It will develop an analysis of African “culture” and its manifestations in our lives as African transwomen—it will speak to issues of autonomy and agency over our lives and bodies.

The charter will be a living document to be reviewed when necessary and contextualized to our own situations and lives.

The charter will continue to serve generations of transwomen to come.

The charter will set out our priorities for advocacy and it will guide our documentation of the process in which we will engage relevant stakeholders and build alliances in order to create a more enabling environment, not only for transwomen, but also our allies who support our goals. Furthermore, to look at ways of supporting the work of our allies, particularly in relation to, but not limited to issues of abortion, child marriage, forced sterilization, female genital mutilation, and other issues pertaining to women’s freedom, sexual and reproductive health and rights, and the full enjoyment of human rights. We take a feminist stance in the interrogation of power in any form, and the disruption of systems of oppression, and to also introspect with consciousness of our own power and privilege.

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We recognize and acknowledge that this document is not cast in stone and that we will find ways to develop mechanisms to review and continuously update it.

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At a meeting in Mellville, Johannesburg, during August 2014, transwomen from Namibia, Botswana, Zimbabwe, Zambia, Lesotho, Uganda, Kenya, Tanzania and South Africa have come together to plan and envision a movement driven by ourselves to articulate our politics and obtain conceptual clarity on working

with feminist ideas. We have adopted the African Trans Feminist Charter at this momentous occasion.

L. Leigh Ann van der Merwe is a trans woman born in rural South Africa. She takes pride in her work as a feminist and women's rights activist. Leigh Ann is particularly interested in intersectional feminism(s). She is a journalist by training but also takes on the identities of leader, researcher, public health enthusiast, and social justice activist.