

# INTERNATIONAL GRANDMOTHERS STATEMENT 2023

*From October 24–26, 2023, more than 750 grandmothers from across 13 countries gathered in-person and virtually as a part of the International Grandmothers Gathering convened by the Stephen Lewis Foundation and community-led organizations. This is their call to action and their pledge to continue their work together.*

For 17 years, we have been united through the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign. Across our differences and in all our diversity, we have been driven by our love for our grandchildren and our communities. This love fuels our passion for justice and our commitment to working together to build a brighter future for ourselves, for our families, and for the generations to come. We are working together towards a world free from AIDS.

**As grandmothers from Eswatini, Ethiopia, Kenya, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, and Zimbabwe** we have held our families and communities together through multiple crises, most notably the continued HIV epidemic. Supported by our community-led organizations, after losing our own children, we became parents to our orphaned grandchildren, healed their emotional wounds, and helped them regain hope. Our love has transformed the devastation of AIDS.

Our story, however, is not only one of triumph. We continue to face inequalities and injustices. We want and deserve better for ourselves, for our grandchildren, and for our communities.

## **United, we demand for all grandmothers:**

**Access to equitable and free health care:** We urgently request health sectors to prioritise the provision of free, high-quality care and services for the elderly. We strongly advocate for putting an end to the prevalent age discrimination and bias that is experienced by so many. It is crucial that elderly people in rural areas have equal opportunities to access quality care in languages they understand. We implore the international community and our governments to collaborate in eliminating the issue of drug stockouts.

**Protection against discrimination and violence:** Elderly women persistently endure degradation and mistreatment. In numerous societies we are unjustly accused of practicing witchcraft for using traditional knowledge. We urge communities to respect the wisdom of grandmothers and recognise the significant role we play in nurturing our nations. In addition to facing stigma and discrimination, grandmothers also suffer from elder abuse and violence at an alarming frequency. We implore law enforcement agencies and justice systems not to overlook these crimes, but rather to treat them with utmost seriousness and uphold the rights of older women.

**Protection and enforcement of land rights:** The rights of grandmothers to own land are undermined by issues such as land grabbing, lack of inheritance rights, and the high cost of obtaining title deeds. We urge our local and national justice systems to ensure the enforcement of existing laws and introduce new laws that safeguard the rights of grandmothers.



### **Improved quality of life and standard of living:**

We work diligently, resourcefully, and collaboratively to provide for our families, but as the cost of living increases and natural disasters strike, only a few of us are able to break the cycle of poverty. We call on our governments to strengthen social assistance plans in our countries, reduce age minimums, and remove barriers to accessing loans and subsidy programs. As the climate crisis intensifies, we call on our governments to ensure we have safe housing to withstand storms, reliable access to clean water, and food security.

**Quality education for our grandchildren:** For decades, we have worked with our community-led organizations to overcome barriers to education for our grandchildren, and yet they persist for far too many families. We call on our governments to eliminate the roadblocks that remain whether it be tuition costs, uniform fees, inadequate transportation, or challenges with grandmothers registering their grandchildren for school. We call on our ministries of education to ensure that the education our grandchildren receive is meaningful and prepares them to take on the leadership of our great nations.

We, the grandmothers of Africa, demand to be included in decision-making bodies and policy discussions as representatives of older persons, women, people living with HIV, and caregivers. **Nothing about grandmothers without grandmothers.**

Africa cannot survive without us. We are not asking for charity, for pity, nor for favours. Access to health care, protection from violence, political representation, food security, shelter – these are our human rights. We have come to claim them.

**As grandmothers and grandmothers from Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia,** we learn continuously from grandmothers in Africa and act in deeply felt solidarity with them to amplify their voices and affirm their goals, values, and expertise. Powerful connections have grown from and within this community of women whose leadership is at the forefront of change.

**We commit to raising awareness** in our communities about the expertise, leadership, and achievements of grandmothers in Africa. We will share their powerful stories to nurture a better understanding and to sustain the vital work to end AIDS in Africa.

**We will raise the resources needed.** We will continue to be creative, energetic, and passionate to raise funds for the Stephen Lewis Foundation to support community-led organizations as they uplift grandmothers in Africa and the children in their care.

**We will grow the movement through meaningful connections,** nurture our existing networks, and explore new opportunities for engagement in the spirit of the resilience of the grandmothers' movement.

We, the members of the Grandmothers to Grandmothers Campaign, reaffirm the commitment we made 17 years ago: **We will not rest until they can rest!**

Together, we grandmothers of 13 nations on four continents have experienced the power of collective action. We have learned from each other's challenges and from each other's victories. **We will persist. We will succeed. We invite you to join us.**