



DECRIMINALISE  
SUICIDE  
WORLDWIDE

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## **LifeLine International launches Decriminalise Suicide Worldwide campaign with a focus on Africa**

*Working across 11 African countries where suicide remains a crime and a further 16 countries where laws are ambiguous, **LifeLine International** is advocating for legislative change and availability of crisis support services.*

**London, October 23, 2023** – Today, [LifeLine International](https://www.lifeline-international.com), a global civil society organisation dedicated to suicide prevention, is launching the campaign Decriminalise Suicide Worldwide with a strong focus on changing the laws in African countries where suicide remains a crime. The first phase of the campaign will focus on advocating for legislative change in Nigeria and Malawi – two countries that criminalise attempted suicide and where there is strong and growing momentum for change.

In Africa, there are at least eleven<sup>1</sup> countries with a combined population of half a billion where attempted suicide remains a criminal offence, according to a new Campaign Brief by LifeLine International with input from the International Bar Association. Laws criminalising suicide are generally associated with higher suicide rates because they are ineffective deterrents and inhibit people in suicidal distress from seeking help.

Decriminalising suicide will help achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goal to decrease global suicide rates by 30% by 2030. Where we seek to change laws, LifeLine International will also work to either establish or enhance crisis line services.

In Nigeria and Malawi, LifeLine International will leverage the organisation's extensive and global campaigning, coalition-building and policy reform experience,

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<sup>1</sup> The Gambia, Kenya, Malawi, Maldives, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Uganda.



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engaging extensively with civil society, governments, and service providers to achieve tangible change. Decriminalisation has gathered positive momentum in the last five years, with legal reform completed in Ghana, Malaysia, Pakistan, India and Singapore.

On the launch of the campaign Lifeline International African Coordinator Professor Taiwo Lateef Sheikh called on governments across the continent to accelerate progress, decriminalise suicide, and implement prevention measures:

*“The decriminalisation of suicide in Africa is an urgent priority given the number of archaic laws that need to be repealed on the continent. Criminalisation is the opposite of compassionate care and does not deter suicide attempts, nor does it address the underlying issues of suicide ideation. It goes against Africa’s cultural and religious values, which emphasise empathy and understanding.*”

*LifeLine International is committed to working with its Members on the continent and other actors of change – including Africa CDC – building on impressive ongoing efforts across the continent.*

*Nigeria and Malawi are both rapidly advancing on their journeys towards decriminalisation and improved crisis support services for individuals in distress. I am convinced we can collectively make this vision a reality.”*

In the 16 African countries with unclear legal frameworks, LifeLine International will engage with governments and civil society organisations to seek clarity and request the removal of barriers preventing people from seeking help. The ambiguity comes from a lack of consistency in the respective legal systems.

Decriminalise Suicide Worldwide is fully aligned with Africa CDC’s commitment to support countries in repealing legislation that acts as a barrier to mental health. The campaign will leverage the health agency’s convening and policy-making power to secure policy reform. Decriminalisation of suicide is also supported by the World Health Organisation – a position endorsed by health ministers in 2013.



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As part of the campaign, two digital platforms launch today:

- A social change campaign platform serving as the public face of the campaign - [www.25crimes.org](http://www.25crimes.org); and,
- A bespoke knowledge platform for experts, NGOs, civil society, and crisis support services to accelerate decriminalisation - [www.suicide-decrim.network](http://www.suicide-decrim.network)

LifeLine CEO Thilini Perera said:

*"Through our knowledge platform, we are bridging the gap between countries, to advocate for change. LifeLine International's commitment to using innovative technology and galvanising support will accelerate decriminalisation campaigns, allowing people living in countries where suicide remains a crime to receive the help they deserve. We are proud to open-source our knowledge to support network participants. Our platform will enable us to track progress and move closer to a world where suicide is decriminalised, stigma is reduced, and help-seeking is both accessible and encouraged."*

### **About LifeLine International in Africa**

LifeLine International is a global civil society organisation whose Members work to prevent suicidal deaths by reducing the stigma of suicide and increasing awareness and support for people in crisis worldwide through the delivery of crisis helplines.

We support the establishment of frameworks for suicide prevention and evidence-based suicide prevention interventions within communities in partnership with local players, and campaign to change the law in countries where suicide remains a crime, and wherever other laws restrict access to life-saving help.

Six of our 27 members – Botswana, Ghana, Malawi, Namibia, South Africa, and Zambia – are based in Africa. Lifeline International African Coordinator Professor Taiwo Lateef Sheikh is our representative to develop a continental view and footprint on suicide prevention and decriminalisation where required.

### **Notes to Editors**

- The online social change campaign platform [www.25crimes.org](http://www.25crimes.org) and the bespoke knowledge management platform [www.suicide-decrim.network](http://www.suicide-decrim.network) will



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go live on 23rd October 2023. An advance preview of material can be arranged through the campaign team.

### **Media contacts**

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