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AFRICAN LEADERSHIP FOR CHILD SURVIVAL: A PROMISE RENEWED”

**STATEMENT BY
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AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

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Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.**

It is a great honour and privilege for me to stand before this distinguished group of delegates and Experts to deliver this statement on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini -Zuma, on a subject that is very close to her heart - "Child Survival and Improving the lives of our children in Africa". Dr Dlamini - Zuma, regrettably, is unable to be here with you today. Her absence is due to unexpected circumstances, which are beyond her control; and she has asked me to convey her regrets in this regard.

May I express my sincere appreciation to the Government of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, UNICEF and all the collaborating partners for inviting the African Union Commission to make a keynote statement at this conference. I also welcome you all to the African Union Commission, the headquarters of Africa's premier continental organization.

Children represent more than half of Africa's population. The future of Africa, therefore, lies with the well-being of its children. In cognizance of this, it is necessary for children to enjoy a healthy environment, and for our Governments to take urgent measures to give them basic education, primary health care, safe and clean water. It is also necessary to protect them during and after conflicts, protect them against HIV/AIDS and other infectious preventable diseases, support the family, and above all, respect the rights of children. It is these factors that make it imperative for us to have a frank discussion on African leadership for Child's survival.

Currently, Africa remains the most difficult place in the world for a child to survive. For most African children, life is harsh and short. Nearly 90 percent of under-five deaths are attributable to six conditions, namely, neonatal causes, pneumonia, diarrhea, malaria, measles, and HIV/AIDS. Yet these are conditions that could be prevented or treated given the technology and the know-how that we have at our disposal today. Even for those that survive beyond the age of five (5), some will suffer the consequences of malnutrition which are profound, far-reaching and irreversible. They face a cycle of recurring illness and growth faltering, irreversibly damaging their physical development and mental capacity with adverse consequences on their educational performance.

As I am speaking today, the rights of thousands of children are violated in our continent despite the existence of legislation and policies to protect them. Most children will continue to face violence in one form or the other through their adolescence and youth. They will be recruited as child soldiers in conflict situations, some will be trafficked or sold, fall victim of inter-country adoption or child labour, not have access to education or healthcare and, of course, suffer sexual abuse and other forms of exploitation. Underlining these forms of violence and abuse, is pervasive gender discrimination that frequently causes girls to be regarded as less worthy of care and protection.

The African Union has always shown commitment by prioritising programmes on children on its agenda for more than two decades now. It has also developed and widely disseminated a number of key legal and policy instruments, as well as reports on children, which have been adopted by Member States. Please allow me to mention some of them:

- African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (1990), with fourty-six (46) Member States as Parties to the Charter. It is our hope that all the fifty-four (54) Member States will be Parties to the Charter;
- Declaration and Plan of Action on Africa Fit for Children (2001);
- Call for Accelerated Action Towards Africa Fit for Children (2007);
- The State of Africa's Children Report that covers the priority areas of the Call for Accelerated Action Towards Africa Fit for Children, namely: The African Child Rights Framework; Enhancing the Life Chances of African Children; Overcoming HIV/AIDS for African Children; Realizing the Right to Education of African Children; Realizing the Right to Protection of African Children; Realizing Children's Rights to Participation and Strengthening the Institutional Framework and Policy Response;
- Continental Policy Framework on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights and the Maputo Plan of Action for its implementation in 2006;
- Campaign on Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA), which was launched in 2009. So far thirty-seven (37) member states have taken ownership of the initiative, and has now been broadened to include newborns; and
- The AU.COMMIT campaign launched in 2009, aimed at accelerating the implementation of the Ouagadougou Action Plan to counter Human Trafficking, especially of Women and Children, which focuses on Prevention, Prosecution and Protection of victims.

These are the parameters set and agreed to at the continental level, which are aimed at putting in place policies designed to make Africa and our societies fit for children and to ensure their survival.

The usefulness of these legal and policy instruments depend on how effectively they are implemented. Truly, we all have a responsibility.

I believe that we can make a difference if we work together and not work as individual organizations or member states. The results of our combined efforts shall certainly be greater than the sum of our

individual efforts. The issue of Child Survival is a call to action to save the lives of our children, and promote healthy and productive families and communities. I am hereby calling upon all stakeholders in this room and beyond, to merge and intensify efforts in order to get the maximum impact. Let us therefore link our initiatives.

I note that the objectives of this meeting include sharpening evidence-based country plans and setting measurable benchmarks, strengthening accountability for maternal, newborn and child survival; and mobilizing broad-based social support.

We do not necessarily have to re-invent the wheel. The African Union already has a monitoring and evaluation framework for member states to monitor and report on the implementation of the *"Call for Accelerated Action Towards Africa Fit for Children."* This meeting can take a lot of inspiration from the AU M&E Framework. Indeed, the 2012 State of Africa's Children Report was based mainly on the responses from Member States to the M&E Framework.

Regrettably, the response from member states to the Framework has not been satisfactory, as only fourteen (14) out of the fifty-four (54) Member States responded, despite the importance of the information to be captured by the framework.

I, therefore, call upon all AU Member States to provide biennial progress reports on the implementation of the *"Call for Accelerated Action towards Africa Fit for Children"* using this M&E framework.

Together, we can make Africa fit for children.

With these few remarks, I wish you fruitful deliberations and thank you for your attention.