



PRESS RELEASE

The Republic of South Africa Celebrates the 25th Year of the Adoption of the Day of the African Child

The Day of the African Child 2015 under the theme “25 years after the adoption of the African Children’s Charter: Accelerating our Collective Efforts to End Child Marriage in Africa”

Johannesburg, South Africa: 15 June 2015-



The Day of the African Child (DAC) is commemorated every year on 16 June by Member States of the African Union (AU), to acknowledge the students of the 1976 Soweto Uprising – a day that contributed greatly to the eventual collapse of the apartheid regime. The day commemorates the violent action inflicted by police officials towards unarmed school children, protesting against the unjust apartheid education system. The DAC also offers the opportunity for stakeholders across all spheres - governments, international institutions and communities - to address the rights of children as well as a continental awareness of the obstacles for attaining these rights.

DAC 2015 commemorated the 25th Anniversary of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and was dedicated towards the AU Commission’s commitment to the elimination of child marriage in Africa.

The DAC celebrations were aimed at: drawing emphasis toward the negative impact of child marriage and the advantageous outcomes of ending the practice. The fostering of

an open discussion and greater awareness by stakeholders - at community, national, regional and continental level - in order to enhance and heighten efforts to accelerate the end of this practice. The need for best practices on ending child marriage in Africa was also highlighted at the tribute, as well as the need to provide a platform for advancing children's participation in ending child marriage.

Further objectives of DAC 2015 included provision for visibility and advocacy as well as the support of youth projects to end child marriage in AU Member States, as such, stressing the importance of the collaboration of various actors to have more influence on advancing children's rights.

DAC 2015 was a two day event, on 14th and 15th June 2015, which included a workshop for 100 children on 14 June. The children who participated in the event came from several member states such as Lesotho, Malawi, Namibia South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe. The workshop was aimed at the development of a joint statement to be presented by the children at the beginning of the program. The workshop also included the objective of developing clear questions to guide the children during the Inter-Generational Dialogue and finally develop the Declaration for the Day of the African Child 2015.

A number of partners facilitated the workshop, which included DSA-AUC, ACERWC, UNICEF, PLAN and UNFPA. The workshop started off with the introduction of the agenda and objectives of the event, as well as the impact and principles of participation from children to foster child rights and end child marriage.

The second day of the commemorative event on 15 June commenced with a march from the Mandela House to the Hector Peterson Memorial Museum to honour the legacy of the children of the 1976 Soweto Uprising. The march was attended by child representatives, RSA Government officials, the AUC, partners from UN and CSOs as well the community around Soweto. Upon reaching the Museum, Ms Faith Mazibuko from the Department of Social Development, Gauteng Province, RSA gave some welcoming remarks to set the tone of the event. To allow for a greater understanding of the commemoration, Ms Nomsa Mtshweni of the Department of Social Affairs Mpumalanga Province, RSA gave the background and context of June 16. To celebrate the lives and efforts of school children of the Soweto Uprising, Minister Bathabile Dlamini and 39 children, to mark 39 years for June 16, laid wreaths.

Appeals presented at DAC 2015 to ensure the eradication of child marriage

This mission in Soweto (South Africa) on the 14 of June 2015, represented by the children of Africa, reiterated the effect of child marriage on the continent, and offered several requests to our governments, parents, guardians, communities, African Union and United Nations. The governments of Member states were implored to enact the laws that say no one will force a girl child into child marriage. The need for an in depth discussion or dialogue between parents and the governments about child marriage served as another key request brought forward by the children of Africa. The African child asked of its governments to facilitate the building of centers or safe havens for

child marriage survivors. It is essential that the impact and importance of education be highlighted, and the children asked of our governments to provide them with schools, and offer encouragement for children to complete their education. Essentially, the governments of our African continent were requested to introduce programmes for children to enable them to express themselves, and ultimately, create laws and legislation that say NO! to child marriage.

The child participants at the DAC voiced themselves towards their parents, guardians and their community to ensure open discussion sessions as well as allow for the opportunity for children to express themselves and provide protection, security and education for their children.

The children also requested the African Union and the United Nations, as key bodies, to develop model policies to declare a person who infects a child with HIV during child marriage, condemned a third degree criminal. The United Nations was requested to offer increased protection toward young girls, in order to prevent them from being married off to older men. Knowledge, such as statistic on child marriage is crucial, and the African Union should communicate with health care services in Member States to get such statistics.

The child participants ultimately highlighted that with active participation and involvement from all platforms, organizations, civil society, governments, communities, structures and the children; as well as continental awareness, Africa may see the elimination of child marriage.

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