

PRESS RELEASE

UNSG, Mr. Antonio Guterres and AU Commissioner for Social Affairs, Dr. Mustapha Kaloko, joins the Government of Kenya, to launch the AU Campaign against Child Marriage, on International Women's Day



"No country can claim to be modern and progressive unless it recognises the importance of gender equality"
- H.E. Margaret Kenyatta, First Lady of the Republic of Kenya

Nairobi, Kenya, 08 March 2017 – In an effort to strengthen and accelerate national consciousness and action towards ending child marriage and gender based violence, the Government of the Republic of Kenya, on International Women's Day, launched the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage and a joint Government of Kenya and United Nations Programme against Gender Based Violence, with the theme, "Celebrating the Bold Women of Kenya".

Her Excellency the First Lady of Republic of Kenya, Mrs Margaret Kenyatta in her keynote address, underscored the importance of women empowerment to any society that considers itself modern and progressive, emphasizing the fundamental need to ensure the protection of the rights of women and girls. The First Lady affirmed that, the national launch of the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage and the joint Government of Kenya/UN programme on Gender Based Violence will ensure that Kenya does not witness again, the sad incidents and harrowing experiences of FGM, child marriages and gender sexual abuse that women and girls have had to endure. She reiterated the commitment of the President of Kenya and the entire Kenyan Government to support AU's efforts in the eradication of child marriage in the continent.

Recent studies in Kenya by UNICEF show that an estimated 23% of girls are married before their 18th birthday. Child marriage rates vary across regions, with the North Eastern and Coast regions having the highest prevalence rates, while the Central region and Nairobi have the lowest rates. A high prevalence of HIV in Kenya means that young married girls are particularly at risk. A survey

in Kisumu showed that 33% of married girls surveyed were infected with HIV as opposed to 22% for their sexually active, unmarried counterparts. Against this background, the United Nations Secretary General, Antonio Guterres called for policies on gender equality and that protects girls and women in vulnerable situations and for all stakeholders to commit to women and girls' empowerment across societies.

The Kenyan Cabinet Secretary for Gender, Youth and Social Protection, Sicily Kariuki informed that Kenya has now adopted a sound and robust legal policy framework that protects the rights of women and girls and provides for equality and non-discrimination as enshrined in the constitution.

On behalf of the African Union Commission, H. E Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, Commissioner for Social Affairs congratulated the Government and people of the Republic of Kenya on the bold step of launching the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage. The Commissioner emphasized the need for all stakeholders to work towards translating the commitments made at the launch in developing a national strategy and Action Plan, to ensure that the Campaign reaches the communities mostly affected by the harmful practice of child marriage and ensuring that the campaign launch, delivers the required change and relief for young girls and women.

The Republic of Kenya is the 19th African Nation to launch the AU Campaign, following from the launches in Ethiopia, Niger, Burkina Faso, Chad, DRC, Madagascar, Uganda, Zimbabwe, Mali, Sudan, Ghana, Eritrea, The Gambia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cameroon and Nigeria.

About the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa:

The AU Campaign to End Child Marriage was launched at the continental level in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 29 May 2014, during the Conference of Ministers of Social Development. The Campaign is aimed at ending child marriage by means of supporting and advocating legal and policy actions in the protection and promotion of human rights; mobilizing continental awareness of the adverse socio-economic impact of child marriage; fostering social movement and social mobilization at the grassroots and national levels; and amplifying the capacity of non-state actors to undertake evidence based policy advocacy including the role of youth leadership through new media technology, monitoring and evaluation - amongst others.

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