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YOUTH DECLARATION ON HUMANITARIAN AFFAIRS IN AFRICA

The Office of the African Union Chairperson's Youth Envoy, in collaboration with The African Union Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development and the Chairperson of the PRC Sub-Committee of Refugees, Returnees and Displaced Persons and the support of partners, organized a Dialogue from the 10th to the 11th of May in Nairobi, Kenya in line with Aspiration 6 of the African Union Agenda 2063 and article 11 of the African Youth Charter, by providing young people with the opportunity to have their voices heard by key decision makers on key issues that are to be deliberated at the Extra – Ordinary Humanitarian Summit and Pledging Conference. It also builds on the recommendations made in the minutes of the meeting held on 6th February 2022 between the Commissioner of the Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development of the African Union Commission H.E Mrs. Minata Samate Cessouma and the Foreign Affairs Minister of Equatorial Guinea, which recalls that “ a Youth Summit should be held to get the African youth perspective on the Humanitarian Situation on the continent”.

Note with appreciation the official opening of the Continental Youth Dialogue by H.E. Ambassador King Adenkule in capacity of Sierra Leone as Chair of the PRC Sub-Committee on Refugees and IDPs, who emphasized the importance of inclusion and participation of youth in humanitarian affairs on the Continent as well as empowering the youth in order to channel youthful energy in the quest for durable solutions to forced displacement on the continent.

Dr Margaret Agama-Anyetei, Ag. Director for Health and Humanitarian Affairs Directorate standing in for H.E Mrs. Minata Samate Cessouma reiterated that the organization of the Youth Dialogue shows the commitment of the AUC to reinforce an inclusive and transformative African Humanitarian architecture founded on the basis of a new spirit of solidarity, cooperation, shared values and mutual accountability in Humanitarian Action in Africa.

Facilitated by the Youth in Africa, more than 300 young people from across the continent joined the dialogue with youth representatives from the AU member states, Regional Economic Communities (RECs), Youth groups and different stakeholders.

Guided by the OAU/AU instruments and decisions on youth peace and security, in particular the Youth Charter and the Assembly Decisions [Assembly/AU/Dec.591 (XXVI)], adopted by the AU Assembly of Heads of State and government at its 26th Ordinary Session held in Addis Ababa,

Ethiopia from 30 to 31 January 2016, and [Assembly/AU/Dec.753(XXXIII)] adopted by the AU Assembly of Heads of State and Government at its 33rd Ordinary Session held from 9 to 10 February 2020, as well as the United Nations Security Council Resolutions (UNSCR) 2250 (2015), 2419 (2018) and 2535 (2020),

Reaffirming the AU's full commitment to prevent and resolve conflicts and foster development programmes with the full inclusion and participation of and also create conducive conditions in order to realize a conflict-free Africa, in line with the Solemn Declaration adopted by the 50th Anniversary of the Organization of African Unity/ African Union (OAU/AU) on 25 May 2013, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, in which the Assembly of the Union pledged not to bequeath the burden of conflict to the next generation of Africans,

With the resultant effect of governance deficits, leading to conflicts whether civil strife or violent terrorism, the leading people being affected are our youths. In this regard, the African Union in its 2009 Kampala Convention on the Protection and Assistance of the Displaced Persons made provisions for government initiatives to accommodate the youth in development structure including the displaced people as a viable means to producing a durable solution for displaced youths.

Mindful of Common African Position (CAP) on Humanitarian Effectiveness and its 10-Year Plan of Action adopted by the Heads of States and Government of the AU assembly in Addis Ababa during 26th ordinary session of the union 30 January 2016. Note with pleasure the preamble of the common African position of humanitarian effectiveness paragraph 1, the involvement of youth and youthful associations as stakeholders on the continent in getting durable solutions to forced displacements.

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT:

- I. ***The African Union and its Member States*** have made efforts in ensuring youth meaningful participation and inclusion in humanitarian affairs.

- II. ***Despite*** these efforts, the continent faces a myriad of challenges. These include complex conflicts , economic crises , poverty , climate shocks, migratory movement leading to several humanitarian issues across the continent. In addition, these challenges have been compounded by the covid-19 pandemic. With all these unprecedented challenges, Africa has seen young people slip into poverty, triggering conflicts, crisis-driven migration within and outside the continent, thus leading to a vicious cycle of under development of the continent. Therefore, as Africa's population continues to grow with young people at the centre, collectively the continent must find solutions to these unprecedented challenges to curtail more humanitarian catastrophes. Against this backdrop, , **following intensive discussion and deliberation, youth participated in the dialogue, on the basis of Five (5) thematic issues:**

- Climate change, Disasters & Forced Displacement
- Youth Livelihoods, Nutrition & Food Security in Humanitarian Spaces
- Covid-19 and Health Challenges affecting youth in Humanitarian space in Africa
- The threat of Humanitarian crises on Youth mobility, Capital development, and the broader African integration agenda
- Humanitarian Financing Challenges

1.Climate change, Disasters & Forced Displacement

Noted that agriculture, which provides a livelihood for about 75% of Africa's population, has been considerably affected by climate change. Severe and prolonged droughts and flooding are significantly reducing yields across the continent;

Concerned with high incidences of climate change induced displacements across the continent affecting for instance the SAHEL region, the Horn of Africa regions, the increase in dessertification in the northern region, the deforestation affecting west Africa and the tsunamis affecting the Southern region.

Deeply convinced that climate related disasters lead to increased humanitarian crises which in turn increases cases of gender based violence and early marriage in young girls, stunting their aspirations and dreams due to protection and assistance of persons of concern during the humanitarian crises..

Solutions/Recommendations

Recommend all member nations to raise awareness on the effects of climate change and common disasters so as to develop and refine mitigation strategies;

Encourage international partners and disaster relief organisations to fund and support affected communities;

Urge young people to take a proactive approach in disaster risk management by volunteering and being part of the solution;

Take cognisance of the Sendai Framework and its domestication by African Union member states to effectively mitigate and find durable solutions on climate related disasters leading to humanitaitian crises.

Call for young people to be engaged in government deliberations towards inclusion in the national development plans on mitigation , prediction, preparedness , early response, livelihood build back and resilience of affected communities.

1. Youth Livelihoods, Nutrition & Food Security

Deeply concerned that over 282 million people are experiencing hunger and food related shortages across Africa, more than double the proportion of any other region in the entire world;

Acknowledge the trend of rural-urban migration and its negative effects on the African Agricultural Sector which leads to reduced agricultural yields;

Having studied that small-scale farmers make up most (85%) of Africa's agricultural output, with rural non-farm households and large-scale farmers making up the rest.

Solutions/Recommendations

Recommend investing in agriculture and the infrastructure surrounding the industry is indeed an important step towards food security;

Encourage member states to invest in youth with skills development and use of diverse modern technology in agriculture to increase food production and promote consumption of locally grown and processed food including in humanitarian settings;

Further encourage member states to curb rural-urban migration by motivating youths with innovative and creative programs to stem the rural –urban migration and create interest in the agricultural sector;

Strengthen youth in humanitarian crises to undertake farming to promote food security and nutrition in humanitarian situations;

Educate and encourage youthful innovation to maximise agricultural yields and adopt climate smart agricultural practices so as to adapt to changing environmental factors;

Allocate resources specifically to involve young people (refugees and migrants) in projects and programs that ensure food security and create an enabling environment for increased self-reliance amongst persons of concern.

2. Covid-19 and Health Challenges affecting Youth in the Humanitarian space in Africa

Note the lack of pandemic preparedness by AU member states, including the decline in coverage and funding of the priority primary health services programs, and inadequate distribution channels for PPEs and Covid-19 vaccines, especially in humanitarian settings;

Acknowledge the Africa Centres for Disease Control and Prevention's (Africa CDC) efforts in disease surveillance, detection and response including emergency preparedness, and its role in strengthening the International Health Regulations (IHR) on our continent;

Acknowledge also the important role played by the AU, the various arms of the United Nations, and other stakeholders in improving equitable access to health services and Universal Health Coverage in Africa;

Noting the pledge made by AU member states in the Abuja Declaration in 2001, to allocate 15% of their annual budgets to strengthening health services, and the commitment made to leave no one and no place behind;

Recognizing that a core function of the member states' basic duty is to protect its citizens against health insecurity, risks and emergencies, especially in a pandemic.

Solutions and Recommendations

Recommend the African Union member states, in partnership with UNHCR, UNFPA, WHO and other key stakeholders to:

1. **Decentralize** primary healthcare services and extend Government health programmes to undocumented young migrants, refugees, asylum seekers and other vulnerable groups;
2. **Mobilise** financial resources required to revive crucial health programs within the continent and implement new SRHR programs that target youths, especially young women and girls, in conflict zones and other humanitarian situations;
3. **Strengthen** policies, innovative strategies and collaborations related to pandemic preparedness and address risk mitigation through the adoption and utilisation of disruptive technologies that improve distribution of medicines and vaccines, and mobilise resources for programmes targeting disease surveillance programs, for humanitarian settings; whilst also increasing the capacity to respond to WASH
4. **Channel** resources towards youth-led initiatives on health innovation and foster collaboration between governments, international partners and youth-led organisations in implementing innovative health programs in humanitarian settings.

3. The threat of Humanitarian crises on Youth mobility, Capital development, and the broader African integration agenda

This thematic session focused on the impact of humanitarian crises on youth mobility, capital development and the broader African integration agenda.

Acknowledged that the continent is on the move and protocols and policies must be put in place to encourage cross border mobility of goods and people.

Deeply Concerned that challenges faced due to bureaucracy and red tapes, are impeding intra-African movement

4. How reduced mobility affects responses to humanitarian crises capital development and The Broader African Integration Agenda:

- Acknowledge that travel limitations like visa requirements lead to delayed humanitarian response from regional development and humanitarian partners and volunteers. Similarly, customs and duty requirements also curtail the movement of investors and

venture capitalists in member states, impeding intra-African Trade and economic growth.

- Note with concern that refugees, asylum seekers and stateless people suffer huge discrimination and sometimes limited access to real opportunities due to restrictions to their movement and integration in society.

Recommend the African Union member states and key stakeholders to:

- **Utilise** regional bodies like The East African Community and SADC in integrating regional corridors in addressing travel and taxation challenges being faced by young people to encourage entrepreneurs and investors to travel beyond their borders and invest in other countries.
- **Provide** security protocols for countries in areas of conflict and ensure participation of refugees in policy and decision-making processes. States should further domesticate set security protocols.
- **Develop** infrastructure needed to improve movement and access across the continent including roads, railway lines, sea ports and airports.
- **Sign up of member states to the free movement protocol and ratification as this will enable youths to have the rights of residency, entry and establishment. This in it self is a durable solution to forced displacements.**

Thematic Session Five - Humanitarian Financing Challenges

This thematic session focused on the challenge of humanitarian financing in Africa.

Acknowledged that there is a challenge financing humanitarian efforts in Africa; further emphasising that the availability of funds has a significant impact on the implementation of reforms and plans and the unpredictability in funding has left projects unfulfilled or ineffectively fulfilled.

Noted that unbalanced integration and coordination of funding mechanisms further hampers the implementation of Humanitarian programs and projects

Recommend member states, and key development stakeholders to:

1. **Prepare** for future humanitarian disasters and mobilise resources towards disasters and all humanitarian challenges. and speed up mobilisation in times of disasters and emergencies.
2. **Coordinate** private sector funding and local organisations as this helps to reduce overreliance on foreign actors.

3. **Encourage** African people in the diaspora to invest back home and donate towards urgent humanitarian responses.
4. **Youth campaign on humanitarian financing and pledging.**

Adopted by the Youth Participants of the AU Youth Humanitarian Dialogue, on 12 May 2022, in Nairobi, Kenya.