

INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Date: 30 October 2023

MEDIA ADVISORY

AFRICAN UNION HIGH LEVEL SESSION ON ADDRESSING SUBSTANCE USE AND RELATED MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS AMONG YOUTH, WOMEN AND CHILDREN

THEME:

“Securing a Better Future for Youth, Women and Children: Building Momentum Towards the Africa We Want”

INVITATION TO THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE MEDIA

What: AU High Level Session on Addressing Substance Use and Related Mental Health Disorders Among Youth, Women and Children.

When: The following are the scheduled meeting days:

- Continental Consultation of Drug Demand Reduction Focal Points (6th to 7th November)
- High-level Session (8th to 10th November)
- Youth Forum on Drug Use Prevention (6th to 10th November)

Where: Lusaka, Zambia

Who: The African Union Commission, Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development and the Government of the Republic of Zambia.

Why: The number of people who use drugs has risen exponentially with a corresponding increase in the number of people with drug use disorders and comorbidities including young people. This is a result of growing market for drugs including those produced locally, in addition to Africa being a major transit area for trafficked drugs of which significant amount remains on the local market. A total of 60 million individuals representing 8.4% of the population aged 15 to 64 years were estimated to have used illicit drugs in Africa in 2018 by the World Drug Report. As a result of its projected population growth, Africa is likely to be particularly vulnerable to an increase in the number of people who use drugs by 2030. The estimated drug use prevalence is projected to increase by 40% in 2030 due to the exponential demographic factors experienced by the continent.

This threatens the health, socio-economic wellbeing and security of people on the continent and impedes continental transformation espoused in AU Agenda 2063 - the Africa We Want. The challenge transcends all the five geographical regions of Africa (Central, East, North, West and South) with an increasing number of countries experiencing a melt-down and unable to cope with the high demand for treatment of drug dependency, a multi-factorial health disorder that affects the brain and causes the course of a chronic, relapsing disease.

Determined to address the problem with long-term strategic interventions, the 4th Ordinary Session of the AU Specialised Technical Committee on Health, Population and Drug Control, in June 2022 adopted the Cairo Declaration on addressing drug use and SUDs among youth, children and women. Through the declaration, African Ministers of Health, population and drug control called for an urgent summit/high level session dedicated towards addressing drug use

and its health-related consequences among especially youth, children and women for the continent to harness the demographic dividend.

Objectives:

The objectives of the high level meeting are to:

- a. Increase knowledge on enhancing legal, policy and institutional frameworks to effectively prevent or reduce drug-use, crime and violence amongst youth, as well as to improve implementation and access to, youth-friendly and gender-sensitive programmes;
- b. Reflect on the overall health and social situation of drug use as well as experiences from the African Union that are in line with such standards in an effort to galvanize and network positive South-South experience exchange;
- c. Discuss newly availed open-sourced tools designed for and experiences derived from, Low-and-Middle-Income countries availing evidence-based, affordable and accessible harm reduction and treatment services and systems in line with the human right principles. A voluntary alternative to convictions, treatment services geared for youth and their families, and women including pregnant women.
- d. Advocate for the value of youth and women leadership, empowerment and inclusion at policy making levels, service provision and being equipped with the necessary tools, skills and platforms to become key enablers in preventing drug use, building resilience to drugs, crime and violence;
- e. Agree on a roadmap for strategic interventions in addressing drug use prevention, and SUDs and increasing access to evidence-based services among youth, women and children in Africa.

Expected outcome:

The meeting endeavour to:

- a. Increased awareness and knowledge of drugs and drug use disorders and interventions in line with the international standards among high level government leadership, policy makers, public health officials and other stakeholders;
- b. High level continental dialogue stimulated to serve as a platform to promote cooperation and collaboration to address evidence-based drug demand reduction responses;
- c. A roadmap for strategic interventions in addressing drug use prevention, harm reduction and, drug dependence treatment among youth, women and children in the African Union agreed.
- d. Donor engagement and expression of commitment and mobilisation of resources for drug demand reduction interventions at regional and member states level.

Participation at the event:

The meeting is expected to bring together Heads of State of AU member states, Leadership of the AU Commission, Ministers and Senior Officials of AU member states in-charge of Interior, Drug Enforcement and Crime Prevention, and mental health related institution experts among other relevant government departments, youth leaders and stakeholders including UN agencies, academia, civil society organizations, private sector, among others.

Representatives of the media are invited to cover the meeting. The Programme is attached.

For further information, please contact:

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