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Commemoration of the Day of the African Child Calls for the Elimination of Harmful Social and Cultural Practices in Africa

Addis Ababa, 14th June 2013: Under the theme of “*Eliminating Harmful Social and Cultural Practices Affecting Children: Our Collective Responsibility*”, the African Union, together with a group of African children and partners, celebrated the 23rd Day of the African Child (DAC), today Thursday 14th June 2013, at its New Conference Centre Headquarter in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.



Organised by the Department of Social Affairs and the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), DAC 2013 aims to draw attention on harmful social and cultural practices against children, and highlight the roles and responsibilities of various stakeholders. In particular, underscoring the roles and responsibilities of the States Parties to the African Charter on the Rights and

Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) in order to combat and eliminate harmful practices against children in Africa.

Officially opening the ceremony, H.E. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, AUC Commissioner of Social Affairs, said the continent's children continue to endure violence, humiliation and other ills perpetrated by and in the interest of the few in the name of cruel age-old traditions that have lost meaning and relevance.

"We need to wake up and ensure that necessary and urgent steps are taken to eradicate injurious, violence oriented and harmful socio-cultural practices against the

continent's children," he added. (see complete speech of Dr. Kaloko on the AU website: www.au.int).

Emphasized on the critical situations of African children, the Mr. David Throp, Country Director of Plan International said the ACRWC requires State Parties "to eliminate social and cultural practices affecting the welfare, dignity, normal growth and development of a child." The large majority of countries in Africa - 48 in total - have ratified the charter and other relevant human rights instruments, he said.

Mr. Victory Koyi, Kenya National Director on his opening speech hit the proverbial hammer on the head pointing out that the list of harmful social and cultural practices in Africa that affect the wellbeing of children is endless. He emphasized that issues including forced marriages, honour killings and sexual slavery were some of the practices that have led to emotional and physical scars on children, and in some cases, their eventual death, he added.

He urged African governments to ensure that departments dealing with children need to be highly prioritized in budgetary allocations. He concluded by quoting Nelson Mandela saying that "There can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way it treats its children."

Dr. Benyam Dawit Mezmur Chairperson of the ACERWC, used this occasion to recall the 1976 uprisings in Soweto stating that the DAC further presents an opportunity to reflect on lived realities of African children today. He said protecting children from all forms of violence, including harmful practices is an imperative of human rights.

He further stressed that while law reform and child friendly policies are important, they are insufficient on their own in guaranteeing the safety of children. In his conclusion, he stated that the year of Pan-Africanism declared by the AUC underscores the need to make progress on the unfinished business of creating an Africa fit for Children.

The event, which was moderated by children, also featured presentations by Girls Not Brides, Save the Children, Africa Child Policy Forum, Inter-African Committee on Harmful Practices, Experts representing AU Member State and Partners, an Intergenerational Panel Discussions on the theme of DAC 2013, with participation of five children representing Northern, Southern, Eastern, Western and Central regions of Africa.

The event was attended by high officials of the AUC, the ACERWC, representatives of AU Member States, UN agencies, Country Directors of international organizations, as

well as children from Egypt, Kenya, Cameroon, The Gambia, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Zambia.

It is to be recalled that the ACRWC, which has been ratified by 47 African countries as of today, recognizes the need to take appropriate measures to promote and protect the rights and welfare of the African child.

DAC is celebrated each year since 1991 to raise awareness and urge everyone to make their utmost efforts in protecting the rights and the welfare of the child in Africa.

For further information, consult AU website: www.au.int