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**AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS
AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD**

**Message of the Chairperson of the African Committee of
Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on the
occasion of the 21st edition of the
DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD (2011)**

Theme: All Together for Urgent Action in favour of - Street Children

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DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD (2011)

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dear children.

The celebration of the Day of the African Child gives us another opportunity to mobilise all our efforts towards the welfare of children, who constitute the backbone of our continent's future.

The Day of the African Child is celebrated on 16 June every year by the African Union, in line with resolution CM/Res.1290 (XL) to commemorate the 1976 massacre of SOWETO children, who merely took to the streets to demand their right to racism-free education, in the then apartheid South Africa.

More than just a commemoration, the Day of the African Child seeks to draw the attention of all actors involved in improving the condition of children on the continent and to unite their efforts to combat the ills that plague the daily lives of children. It is also an occasion for Governments, international institutions and communities to deal with this delicate condition of children by organising activities to promote the rights of the child.

“All Together for Urgent Action in favour of r Street Children”: that is the theme which the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child invites the African Community to meditate on during this year 2011 before the celebration of the 21st Day of the African Child. By street children, we mean “any boy or girl under adult age for whom the street has become home and/or their source of livelihood”.

Africa is one of the regions in the world with the highest poverty level and where survival chances for children are among the lowest.

By deciding to lay emphasis this year on a specific category of children, the Committee intends to draw the attention of African societies to the serious threat posed to their stability and cohesion. The conception of the African family has always given the impression that the street children phenomenon would be marginal on the continent. Is it still possible today for the most vulnerable of children to easily find protection and refuge with a member of their community, which itself is struggling for its own survival?

The number of street children in the world, though very difficult to assess, is estimated at 120 million (that is, one of every five children, according to ILO and

UNICEF studies), out of which 30 millions are in Africa and a majority of which are boys.

The issue of children living on the streets in African towns is the visible face of large-scale violations of rights which thousands of children suffer.

In fact, the underlying reason for the presence of children on the streets is always linked to trampled basic rights. The condition of the street children should be seen as a response to a chain and accumulation of factors which are diversified and at different levels.

We are particularly referring to the linkages and accumulation of structural factors (such as poverty, demographic explosion, rural exodus, undesirable material and psychological conditions of urban families, injustices from the domineering nature of globalisation, etc.) and of inter-personal factors (such as subjection to violence on a daily basis : rejection, scorn, forced imitation, imposed deviant behaviour, etc.).

The direct causes which could explain why children stay on the streets of many towns in our continent include, inter alia : “handing over” of children to guardians, inhuman treatment, armed conflict, discord between spouses, separations and difficulties associated with parenthood, direct consequences of STIs/HIV-AIDS, etc.

On the streets, the children often encounter fatal threats and bad behaviours. They are battered by weather conditions, hardship, destitution, diseases, accidents and apathy. They also face insecurity, acts of violence, sexual abuse in an environment where might is right, which expose them to encounters and influences of the worst order. Young girls are solicited for sex from a very tender age and they end up in prostitution.

Furthermore, in most countries, prostitution by girls and boys is becoming routine and constitutes a source of income. Lastly, most street children, even the youngest of them, use drugs and are exposed to HIV/AIDS. In any case, their daily lives are in contradiction to childhood as defined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In some cases, it is those who are charged with protecting children who commit crimes against them.

Combating a scourge requires prior in-depth analysis thereof. That is why we feel that reflection on the condition of street children should revolve around the following major questions:

- Who are street children?
- What is the scale of the phenomenon on the continent?
- What reasons explain their separation from family homes?
- What dangers are they exposed to on the streets?
- What protective measures should be envisaged for them?

- What preventive mechanism should be put in place?

The terrifying life which some of those who constitute our future are forced to live compels us to react in an appropriate manner. The increasingly growing presence of children on the streets attests to the urgency of increased actions and of adapting intervention strategies directed at them.

Consequently, there is a need to devote the greatest amount of effort and resources to finding appropriate solutions to stem the large-scale abuses of the rights of this category of children. Ensuring widespread awareness of the dangers street children face and taking urgent steps to protect them should constitute goals which every African State Party to the Charter should strive to achieve. We should give back to our street children their childhood, which means giving them parental love, family protection, the joy of discovery, a playful environment and the opportunity of learning to live a harmonious life in society.

Therefore, we invite families, children, children's organisations, as well as organisations for the protection and promotion of child rights to claim ownership of the theme of the Day of the African Child and to work to make mobilisation around this theme to last longer than just one day.

Now, concerning political authorities, as we acknowledge the great efforts already made towards children's welfare, we again urge officials at the highest level to include the fight against this phenomenon of street children in national development priorities, as well as any action that favours allocation of significant resources to implementing assistance and rehabilitation programmes for the affected children.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child will make a global assessment of this commemoration and intends to play its role in working with States to ensure better protection for children. More than just a strong commitment, it is urgent to take concrete steps so as to reassure the children of the unwavering desire to build the Africa they deserve.

Thank you.

Agnès KABORE/Ouattara
Chairperson of the Committee