

OPENING REMARKS OF DR BENYAM DAWIT MEZMUR, CHAIRPERSON OF THE  
AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE  
CHILD ON THE OCCASION OF THE 21<sup>ST</sup> ORDINARY SESSION OF THE  
COMMITTEE

**Your Excellency Commissioner of Social Affairs,**

**Honorable Committee Members,**

**Honorable Guests, Partners, Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen...**

**All protocols observed.**

Good morning and I would like to welcome you all!

First of all I would like to thank all those who worked hard to make this meeting of the African Committee happen. In particular, I would like to thank the Commissioner of Social Affairs and colleagues at the Department, and of course the Secretariat. On behalf of the Committee, I also would like to thank the African Union, in particular the PRC, for enabling the African Committee to have its autonomous budget for the first time beginning from this year. In this regard I want to specifically thank our former Chairperson Mme Agnes Kabore for her leadership and all the effort she was able to put into during this process.

I am happy to report that between our 20<sup>th</sup> Session in November 2012 and now, April 2013, quite a lot of activities have taken place within the mandate of the African Committee. These include the Committee's role in the Cairo +10 (An Africa Fit for Children) event, follow-ups to concluding observations of the Committee, follow-ups to Communications, the Committee's active participation in the January 2013 African Union Summit, a number of efforts made to strengthen our collaboration with AU organs and departments such as the African Court, African Commission, the Peace and Security Council, the African Union Commission on International Law, Department of Social Affairs, Office of the Legal Counsel, Department of Political Affairs, and activities done in collaboration with partners such as UNICEF, UNHCR, Save the Children, Plan International, Child Fund, African Child Policy Forum, activities undertaken within the framework of the African Child Charter Project and others.

In relation to ratifications, I am happy to report that Swaziland has become the latest country to ratify the Charter. South Sudan has signed the Charter in January 2013. During the January 2013 Summit, the Committee has had the opportunity to speak to – on a bilateral level – to all the remaining countries that are not yet States Parties to the Charter. The response we have had from all of these countries is positive, and the Committee will do all it can to follow-up on these positive gestures. We also want to call upon all stakeholders to support and lobby these countries to accelerate their ratification process. Indeed a (universal) ratification of the African Children's Charter by all Member States of the African Union by the end of 2014 is within reach.

As far as our core mandate of examining State Party Reports is concerned, the Committee is undertaking proactive measures to collaborate with States Parties,

as well as UNICEF. Progress is being made in this regard (for instance, four types of tailor-made Note Verbales were sent to States Parties), and we anticipate that we will be able to receive a number of State Party Reports before the end of the year. In this context, I encourage all civil society partners to continue to monitor these developments closely in order to prepare the corresponding Complementary Reports.

We are also making concrete plans to resuscitate our collaboration with the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child. In this respect, we will continue to solicit, in particular, the advise and support of UNICEF as well as the OHCHR. I also look forward to using my leverage in both Committees to strengthen our collaboration. On this note, I would like to personally and humbly thank all my colleagues in the Committee, the AU Office of the Legal Counsel, and the Department of Political Affairs (particularly, Her Excellency the Commissioner and Mr Salah Ahmed) and others for the strong support I benefitted from before, during and after my candidacy for the UN Committee on the rights of the Child!

In these five days, you can see that we have a very ambitious and busy but also doable programme. We have tried to make a number of the sessions "open sessions" in order to maximize your participation. Some of the activities we will undertake during these days include the consideration of the State Party Report of Burkina Faso, presentations on the UN Alternative Care Guidelines, presentation on "childhood", and of course a one day thematic discussion on the Post-2015 Development Agenda. We also have a number of the usual standing agenda items on the Committee's programme of work scheduled for deliberations. I encourage you all to actively participate in these discussions.

This is my first opening speech as Chairperson of the Committee. When I was nominated and elected by my colleagues in November 2012 to be Chairperson, it was done on the understanding that as much as I had their unreserved and full support to be Chairperson, I was also equally assured that I would continue to benefit from their inputs and highest level of collaboration in the execution of our mandate. I am happy to report that they have demonstrated the true intention of their words by their actions, and I would like to sincerely thank all of them for their meaningful involvement, collaboration, and hard work. I also would like to thank the Secretariat of our Committee for their continued support in the day to day running of the affairs of the Committee, among other things, for working hard to bring this 21<sup>st</sup> Session into a reality.

On behalf of the Committee, I again want to thank the African Union, UN agencies, civil society partners, and others who continue to support the work of the Committee.

With this brief remarks, I have the pleasure to declare the 21<sup>st</sup> Session of the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child officially open.

Dr Benyam Dawit Mezmur

Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

15 April 2013