



DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD (2013)

**Theme: Eliminating Harmful Social and Cultural
Practices Affecting Children: Our Collective
Responsibility**

Friday, 14th June 2013

New AU Conference Center (AUCC) Headquarters

**Message from ChildFund International on the occasion of the
23rd edition of the
DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD (2013)**

**Theme: Eliminating Harmful Social and Cultural Practices
Affecting Children: Our Collective Responsibility**

- Department of Social Affairs of the Africa Union Commission
- The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child
- Key representatives of the Government of Ethiopia
- Diplomatic missions and UN agencies
- International organizations and NGOs
- Children and parents

Distinguished guests, children, ladies and gentlemen.

ChildFund International is honored to participate in the celebrations marking the 23rd Day of the African Child, on the theme **Eliminating Harmful Social and Cultural Practices Affecting Children: Our Collective Responsibility**. We congratulate the Africa Union again on hosting this historic occasion.

There are a number of harmful social and cultural practices in Africa that affect the wellbeing of children. The list is endless: child and

forced marriages, female genital mutilation, son preference and infanticide, honor killings, using children in forced begging, bonded labor, sexual slavery and violence on children with disabilities including albinism, food taboos and forced feeding, acid attacks, stoning, virginity testing as well as breast ironing. These harmful and violent practices have led to emotional, physical and mental scars to children and in many instances they have led to eventual death of many African children as they are not able to defend themselves.

The SRGC (Special Representative of the Secretary-General on Violence against Children) report confirms that while there have been commendable efforts by African countries to enact comprehensive laws on children, not all law reform amounts to harmonization with international and regional standards. In addition, many African countries have laws that are not implemented, despite the number of signed international and national laws.

Currently, in most African countries, government departments charged with Children welfare are seriously under funded through budgetary allocations in favor of other government priorities. This skewed budgetary allocations have in the past, inhibited these government departments to respond effectively to harmful social and cultural issues affecting children. Accordingly, we urge African governments to ensure that Children departments are highly prioritized in budgetary allocations.

Many other development agencies are committed to eliminating harmful, social and cultural practices affecting children in Africa.

Distinguished guests, ChildFund International has contributed to eliminating harmful social and cultural practices in the 12 countries it operates in, in Africa.

ChildFund International's child protection work aims to reduce children's vulnerability and strengthen their resilience and well-being. ChildFund mobilizes communities to support child protection by strengthening local capacities, while encouraging children's leadership in recognizing and addressing the risks in their daily lives. ChildFund undertakes a comprehensive approach by: advocating for child protective policies at the community, national and international levels; learning from and building on local cultural resources; building local people's capacities to assert their rights through training and guidance on technical issues and educating policy leaders on child protection issues.

Through its role in the Child Protection in Crisis Network, ChildFund is leading an interagency research on formal and informal child protection systems in Liberia and Uganda. This research is leading to evidence-based program interventions to strengthen national child protection systems. National child protection systems strengthening builds political awareness and buy-in, helping national governments to shift their thinking from responding to individual cases of abuse and neglect to systemic change.

ChildFund further encourages birth registration of children especially during child verification process to help collect data on children to effectively implement programs that help them access social services. Our collective responsibility, ladies and gentlemen, including research institutions, governments, local partners, religions leaders, scholars as well as grass-root organizations is to influence change with supporting,

legislation that can then gain traction as a genuine deterrent. As experience in Africa and beyond as shown, when such a process of dialogue and engagement is pursued by motivating change from within, legislation is then envisaged as a fruit of true conviction, rather than the imposition of judgmental and external values.

As I close my remarks on this day ladies and gentlemen, the demand by African children to all African union states on this 23rd commemoration of the Day of the African Child focusing on elimination of harmful social and cultural practices affecting children as our collective responsibility is timely and demands response from all duty bearer governments, the international community of nations and all developmental actors. And as Nelson Mandela once said.....there can be no keener revelation of a society's soul than the way it treats its children.

Thank you so much.