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**STATEMENT BY H.E DR MUSTAPHA SIDIKI KALOKO
COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**AT THE EXPERT CONSULTATION MEETING ON CHILDREN AND
SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS IN AFRICA**

**THEME: CHILDREN AND SOCIAL PROTECTION SYSTEMS: BUILDING
THE AFRICAN AGENDA**

Hon Minister Bethabile Olive Dlamini, Minister of Social Development of the Republic of South Africa,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen

It is my honor and pleasure to welcome you to this important Expert Consultation Meeting on Children and Social Protection Systems in Africa. I bring you warm greetings from the Chairperson of the AU Commission, Her Excellency Dr. Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma. I wish to express my sincere gratitude to the Government and people of South Africa for hosting this meeting in this beautiful city of Cape Town.

The action and interventions of today will provide a brighter future tomorrow. Investment in the welfare of children is never misplaced; it is a true investment that yields unimaginable returns, as it takes care of health, access to education and nutrition. It breaks down social barriers and narrows the gap between children from poor households and those from privileged middle and upper income homes.

In the African Union, great efforts have been made to deal with these issues in a more holistic manner. The Charter on the Right and Welfare of the Child, is not only insistent on protecting children, it spells out their rights, the role stakeholders should play in creating the right environment and the provision of the basic needs for their mental and physical growth and wellbeing.

Other initiatives such as SPIREWORK (which deals with Social Protection for the workers in the rural and the informal economy and a major issue at the Special Session and the Extra-Ordinary Summit of the AU Heads of State and Government in September 2014 in Burkina Faso) COHA, ARISE, CARMMA, Campaign on Harmful Traditional Practices and our new campaign to be launched against Child Marriage, are all addressing the welfare of children while enhancing their rights for a splendid future.

For a more concrete and sustainable intervention on behalf of Africa's population, especially towards children of the continent, who form nearly 40% of the continent's population (if we go by Africa Union's definition of children), we have increasingly focused on development issues that take into consideration a people centered approach and growth that is inclusive. Recent initiatives such as the 2014-2017 Plan of Action of the Commission; the Solemn Declaration of Heads of State in May 2013; the Communiqué from the Ministerial Retreat in Bahir Dar; the Declaration and Africa's Common Position on the Review of the ICPD; and the African Common Position on the Post 2015 Development Agenda, speak to the issues of development with our people at the center. Agenda 2063 on the other hand, encapsulates all these initiatives into a single whole with the vision of meaningfully and sustainably managing Africa's resources while planning for Africa's prosperity and the wellbeing of its people, especially the children, youth and women.

Extending grants to children therefore, as a form of social protection, is not only a conduit that allows children from marginalized/vulnerable and rural households or from the streets on to the mainstream of society. It also serves as a tool of empowerment for those homes to move from poverty and social exclusion. Overall, it lays the basis for economic transformation and inclusive growth.

Through the discussion and exchange of views around the progress and opportunity of expanding right-based social protection in Africa, we expect sound and constructive recommendations that put the rights of children at the center of the continent's inclusive economic growth and development. On the other hand, we look forward to learn from best practices in social protection across Africa and to share evidence on impacts, financing, scaling up and implementation. It is my wish that we employ our minds in synthesizing the good practices from fellow Member States that may assist in turning around our financing, scaling up and implementation of policies geared towards lifting up our children from poverty and misery.

Let me assure you that the AUC will continue to do its best to be a strong advocate and champion for the rights and welfare of the child in Africa and elsewhere. This commitment is also borne by the centrality of social protection as encapsulated in the Social Policy Framework for Africa (SPF).

Finally, allow me to once more thank the South African Government for this exemplary initiative that draws children from poverty to the plains of social inclusion. Let me also use this opportunity to express my appreciation to UNICEF for supporting our efforts and for the role played in the planning and organization of this expert consultation meeting.