

AFRICAN UNION

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**Welcome Remarks by Adv. Bience Gawanas,
Commissioner for Social Affairs, African Union
Commission**

World AIDS Day

**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
1st December 2011**

Theme: “Getting to Zero”

**Slogan: “Zero New HIV Infections, Zero Discrimination and Zero
AIDS Related Deaths”**

**Your Excellency theUNAIDS Deputy Executive Director,Jan Beagle,
Excellency the Ambassador of the United States mission to the
African Union Commission Michael A. Battle, Sr.**

**Distinguished Members of the Diplomatic Corps,
Representatives of UN Agencies, CSOs and other organizations here
present**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is indeed a great honor for me to welcome you to the African Union Commission and most importantly to this Panel Discussion on “Zero Mother to Child Transmission of HIV”. I wish to express my heart-felt appreciation to panelists for accepting to be in this panel as we mark the World AIDS Day. I also would like to thank all participants here present for taking off some time to attend this commemoration.

Ladies and gentlemen, take a minute and think about the millions of lives our continent has lost to this pandemic since the early 80’s. The number of people who died of AIDS-related causes in 2010 alone was 1.8 million. Today we talk about two-thirds of all HIV infections in the world being in Africa. We cannot accept to be silent. This is the moment for us as stakeholders in the fight against the AIDS pandemic to increase our advocacy and action in effort to mitigate HIV and AIDS.

In 2001, African leaders declared “AIDS a State of Emergency on the Continent”. They recognized that the epidemics constitute not only a major health crisis, but also an exceptional threat to Africa’s development, social cohesion, political stability, and food security, as well as to the survival and life expectancy of African peoples.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

The African Union Commission (AUC) acknowledges the seriousness of the HIV and AIDS pandemic in Africa and its significant impact on the mothers and children. In order to mitigate the impact of HIV and AIDS on the mothers and children in Africa, the AUC is developing an “African Plan Towards Elimination of New HIV Infections among Children by 2015 and Keeping Their Mothers Alive”. This Draft Policy will be discussed in detail during today’s panel.

From 1st December 2011 right up to 2015, it's envisioned that different regions and groups will each year chose one or all of the Zeros that best addresses their situation.

Excellencies

Ladies and Gentlemen

The Day is also a reminder that those infected and affected require support and solidarity; and that, like other human beings need to be accorded their fundamental rights. Furthermore, it is a reminder that everyone is at risk.

I wish to conclude by reminding all of you that, in order to attain the “3 Zeros”, everyone has a role to play by promoting universal access to prevention, treatment which is now more affordable even at individual level, as well as care and support. Expressing empathy and solidarity with those in need is very useful in the hour of need or despair is another intervention that we can employ.

Once again, I wish thank you very much for taking time from your busy schedules to be with us for this event.