



**NINETEENTH SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS
ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD (ACERWC)**

AU CONFERENCE CENTRE, ADDIS ABABA

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**STATEMENT BY ADV. BIENCE P. GAWANAS
AU COMMISSIONER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS**

**The Chairperson of the African Committee
Distinguished Members of the African Committee
Representatives of UN agencies
Representatives of National and International Organizations,
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is a great pleasure for me to warmly welcome you all once more to the African Union Headquarters, to yet another sitting of the ACERWC – its 19th Session.

I would like to especially commend the Committee Members for their increasingly complex role in protecting our children. It is almost hard to imagine how much has happened in the last three years. The Committee has considered more than fifteen States Party's Reports on the implementation of the Charter. Concept notes have been sent to State Parties and partners for the commemoration of the Day of the African child (DAC). Another significant outcome of the committee is the key decision on the Nubian children to enjoy their rights, including the right to belong to a particular nation.

I now see that the Committee is discussing the provision of the Charter in order to give its views and make recommendations to State Parties and Partners for the implementation of the charter's provision through a general comment. This will obviously give more visibility to their work and draw the attention of State Parties to the Committee's role and mandate.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am truly happy that this 19th Session of the ACERWC has been dedicated to Article 21 of the Charter which stipulates protecting children against harmful social and cultural practices. Such harmful practices, we all know, have persisted, and children have mostly been the victims of various forms of physical and /or psychological violence, which subsequently affect their welfare, dignity, and normal development. .

Let me mention that the discussions on HTP at this session are most welcome and are a much needed follow-up to the Pan- African Conference on Celebrating Courage and Overcoming Harmful Traditional Practices in Africa, held on 5 to 7 October, 2011, here in Addis Ababa. The Conference recommended the African Union to urge Governments to domesticate key legislative instruments that have already been ratified, for combating HTPs. While we recognize Governments' efforts in passing laws criminalizing these practices and also developing national policies to sensitize communities against them, we must admit that there is still a huge gap between goals and reality and therefore it is important that we work collectively to end all forms of violence against children.

The theme of this year's Day of the African Child (DAC) 2012 - **"The Rights of Children with Disabilities: Duty to Protect, to Respect, to Promote and to Fulfill"** is

consistent with the African Union Commission's (AUC) activities on Disability. The Department of Social Affairs (DSA) is currently assisting in the restructuring of the African Rehabilitation Institute. Importantly, the *Call for Accelerated Action towards Africa Fit for Children* particularly notes the special vulnerability of children with disabilities and makes specific recommendations to Member States and other stakeholders. To this end I urge all Governments to allocate adequate resources to strengthen social protection measures for children, in particular, the vulnerable.

You may be aware that the Department of Social Affairs is also working on other priority areas for children, and permit me highlight our priorities for this year.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The AUC is in the process of organizing the 3rd *Pan African Forum on children* which will be held during the last quarter of this year, 2012, to assess the work of Member States, and explore possibilities for more investments in children. The duty of protection and provision as enshrined in the Charter obliges State Parties to allocate the necessary resources for the recognition of child rights in the Continent and without this, the human rights obligations enshrined in this Charter remain promises on paper that will not be translated into wellbeing outcomes.

Furthermore, following the recommendations made at the 2nd Pan African Forum on Children in 2007, the African Union Commission was tasked to create a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework to be sent to Member States to report on their progress in the implementation of the *Call for Accelerated Action towards Africa Fit for Children*. The Framework was adopted at the 2nd African Union Conference of Ministers of Social Development CAMSD2 in November 2010, prepared and finalised, and sent to Member States in 2011. A report of responses from the M&E Framework will be presented as a key working document at the 3rd *Pan African Forum*.

Also, the next edition of the *State of Africa's Children Report* will be produced this year and this is a very useful tool for advocacy and information on statistics of children on the continent, and hence important for the Committee's works.

Although the African Union Commission and the Committee are making efforts to ensure the promotion, protection, and the wellbeing of our children, more needs to be done so that African children will no longer continue to suffer from illnesses, lack of basic education and healthcare services. I therefore urge Governments, communities and partners to put in place policies and strategies, and allocate sufficient resources, to ensure that basic human and legal rights of children are safeguarded and become a common feature of our African socio-economic landscape.

Let me close by thanking the GIZ and Plan International for their support in organizing this session; and to all partners who have continuously reinforced the work of the

Committee and contributed in strengthening its capacity, your commitment and enthusiasm towards promoting, protecting, fulfilling and respecting the rights of the African child is appreciated. Here I wish to mention the SIDA Partner's Project for the implementation of the Project titled "*Promoting the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*" and of course UNICEF for its constant support.

On behalf of the African Union I congratulate National and International NGOs for organizing the CSO Forum in the best interest of African children and also for providing support to the Committee in achieving its mandate.

I thank you for listening.