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**AIDS WATCH AFRICA (AWA) CONSULTATIVE  
EXPERTS MEETING  
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 21-22 JUNE 2012**

**Statement by  
H.E Adv. Bience P. Gawanas  
Commissioner for Social Affairs, African Union Commission**

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**Members of the Diplomatic Corps  
Member State Experts  
Representatives of Regional and International Organizations  
Representatives of Civil Society Organizations]  
Distinguish Participants  
Ladies and Gentlemen**

It is an honour and a privilege for me to welcome you to the AIDS Watch Africa (AWA) Consultative Experts Meeting. I wish to convey to you the warm greetings from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr. Jean Ping. He sends his best wishes for a successful and productive meeting.

African Union leadership has consistently considered the combined burden of AIDS, tuberculosis (TB) and malaria as an emergency on the continent and kept it high on its national and continental agenda.

At the Abuja 2001 Special Summit, and as a show of leadership and commitment to meeting the crisis of HIV/AIDS head on, eight African leaders joined hands to create AWA as an advocacy platform to mobilize action and resources. It was also as a show of commitment to monitor progress on implementation of the Abuja Declarations on AIDS, TB and Malaria. Originally coordinated from Abuja, AWA Secretariat was incorporated into the AU Commission in 2004.

Since the creation of AWA and under its leadership, Africa has made many achievements through concerted efforts of Member States, regional and international partners to combat HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria. These include: Unprecedented community mobilization for better access to prevention, treatment, care and support; development of more and better coordinated partnerships; progressive increases in national budget allocation to the health sector, even if some are yet to meet the 15% Abuja

target; the creation of a common fund for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria of which Africa has been the main beneficiary.

Despite the successes in the response to HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria, the burden of these three killer diseases on socio-economic development in Africa is still immense. Access to essential health services is still inadequate in many settings, thereby making new infections outpace the rate of scaling up treatment programmes.

These developments have not escaped the attention of our Heads of State and Government. The AU Assembly at its 18<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session in January 2012, decided to revitalize the AIDS Watch Africa (decision Assembly/AU/Dec.395(XVIII)) as an “AU Heads of State and Government Advocacy and Accountability Platform, as well as to mobilize resources to fight HIV, TB and Malaria in Africa”. The Assembly also decided to broaden the mandate of AWA to include Tuberculosis and Malaria in addition to HIV/AIDS, as well as to broaden the representation of AWA to be continent-wide. A revitalized and rejuvenated AWA would be a strong voice in mobilizing more resources for health and to fight these three diseases, as well as in improving accountability on commitments to attain the Health MDG targets by 2015.

With the support of all of us here, I anticipate that AWA to be more effective than before, due to of the revitalized structure and the renewed commitment of our leaders. The AWA Heads of State and Government Action Committee which serves as the primary structure of AWA and the AWA Consultative Expert Committee whose main function is to review continental progress towards meeting commitments and to determine policy priorities and make recommendations to the AWA Secretariat. The AWA Secretariat coordinates all activities and programmes, will ensure the revitalized AWA functions to full capacity.

The AWA Consultative Experts Meeting is taking place against significant developments in funding landscape for HIV, TB and Malaria. This meeting therefore, is very important as you will consider:

1. The Draft Report on the Future Direction of AIDS Watch Africa (AWA); and
2. The Draft Roadmap on Shared Responsibility and Global Solidarity for Africa's Response to HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria 2012-2015.

The outcome of the Consultative Meeting will form the working documents of the Heads of State and Government Action Committee on AWA, which will take place on 14 July 2012.

My sincere hope is that this meeting will produce very concrete outcomes for boosting the HIV, TB and Malaria response through accountability in Africa. I wish to assure you that the African Union Commission will, within its existing mandates, continue urge Member States to be accountable for the commitments they have adopted to improve the health of the people on the continent, particularly for most vulnerable.

I cannot complete this statement without expressing the appreciation of the AU Commission to all our partners who have supported us to make this meeting a reality. In particular, I wish to acknowledge and commend the support of UNAIDS.

I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you for your attention.