

**PRESS RELEASE N°09/23rd AU SUMMIT****African Nutrition Champion urges African leaders to invest in nutrition**

MALABO, Equatorial Guinea, 26 June 2014- Recently appointed African Nutrition Champion, His Majesty King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho today pressed African governments to commit resources to their nutrition plans to allow them to reap the benefits of investment in nutrition. The king made the call during a breakfast meeting held on the sidelines of the 23rd African Union Heads of State and Government Summit under the theme, “Strengthening Advocacy for Improved Nutrition and Inclusive

Development.”

King Letsie III told African leaders that “investing in nutrition is an investment in the social and economic development of the continent”.



Africa is the only continent in the world, where the number of stunted children has increased. Stunting, or low height for age, is associated with impaired brain development, which is likely to have long-lasting negative consequences throughout a child’s life and in a nations’ socio economic growth. If having access to enough food is necessary for a person’s survival, then getting an adequate combination of safe and nutritious foods is fundamental to his or her future, and to the wellbeing, health and development of entire communities and economies.

In his address, His Majesty, King Letsie III, emphasized that “poor nutrition is closely linked to extreme poverty, and improving nutrition is a prerequisite for reaching the

targets of the Millennium Development Goals, especially those related to education and health. This places a heavy burden on us to work hard, in collaboration with stakeholders outside nutrition, in order to see positive results on economies of African countries.”

“Investing in nutrition will greatly improve productivity, economic growth, and will promote education, intellectual capacity and the social development of people,” said Dr. Mustapha Sidiki Kaloko, Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African Union Commission.

Partners also asserted or re-affirmed their commitment to nutrition, including UNICEF, the United Nations World Food Programme and Save the Children.

“The nutritional status of a child is influenced by three broad factors: intake of quality food, health and care,” said Dr. Noel Marie Zagre, UNICEF’s Regional Nutrition Advisor for Eastern and Southern Africa. “The programmes that address malnutrition therefore have to be multi-sectoral and multi-stakeholder. The most crucial time to meet a child’s nutritional requirements so as to avoid long term and irreversible damage is during the first 1,000 days, beginning from the start of pregnancy to the child’s second birthday.”

United Nations World Food Programme Africa Office Director, Dr. Menghestab Haile, highlighted the statistics that emerged from the Cost of Hunger in Africa (COHA) study, noting that “we have systematically under-invested in the nutrition and food security sector and expressed the scope and magnitude of the problem as well as offered policy options to guide decision makers.”

On his part, Mr. Franco Wandabwa, Africa Advocacy Director of the Save the Children, called for strong leadership in leading the fight against malnutrition, adding that Africa could ill-afford the cost of child stunting.

A key objective of this breakfast meeting, organized by the African Union Commission and supported by UNICEF, WFP and Save the Children, was to continue to rally high-level political resolve, leadership and commitment among African leaders on decisive policies and programmes to invest more in nutrition.

ends

Editor’s Note

In January 2014, His Majesty King Letsie III, the reigning King of the Kingdom of Lesotho, was appointed by the Assembly of African Union Heads of State and Government as the African Nutrition Champion for a two-year period. King Letsie III committed to advocate to Heads of State and Government and high level policy makers on the continent for increased awareness, commitment and investment for better nutrition for all Africans.

For media inquiries and requests contact:

Ms. Tankou Azaa Esther, African Union Commission, YambouE@africa-union.org

Mr. Kenneth Oliko, African Union Commission, Kennetho@africa-union.org

Mr. Anthony Mwangi, UNICEF, amwangi@unicef.org

Mrs. Sophia Nesri, WFP, sophia.nesri@wfp.org

Mr. Franco Wandabwa, Save the Children, FWandabwa@savechildren.org