

PRESS RELEASE

North Africa Regional Capacity Building Workshop on Ending Child Marriage and other Harmful Traditional Practices in Africa opens in Cairo, Egypt

Cairo, Egypt, 27 March 2016– A five-day workshop to build the capacity of North African Member States of the AU, to end Child Marriage kicked off today in Cairo, Egypt.

The workshop organised by African Union Commission in conjunction with UNFPA, UNICEF, Inter-African Committee and the African Child Policy Forum, under theme;



"Ending Child Marriage and Other Harmful Traditional Practices in Africa - Mechanisms and Strategies" is being attended by experts from Regional Economic Communities, Member States and regional based Civil Society Organizations from the North African Region and is the 3rd in the series of Workshops, with similar workshops having taken place in Zambia and Nigeria for Eastern and Southern Africa; and West and Central Africa respectively.

The workshop will encompass theoretical presentations on the linkages of harmful traditional practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation, the role of stakeholders and the effect of traditional and religious practices of child marriage on Africa's socio-economic development.

In her welcome remarks, the Egyptian Deputy Minister of Health and Population, Dr Maissa Shokri, expressed appreciation for the commitment shown by the African Union Member States towards the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa and outlined some of the lessons learned from the Egyptian experience on the eradication of FGM/C and the aspiration to declare Egypt as child marriage and FGM free. She referred to policy level actions adopted by the Egyptian government to provide a protective framework, including the 2008 child law, as well as the 2014 national strategy on child marriage, which revolved around the early detection of girls at risk of dropping out, formulating unified messages on the harmful effects of CM, targeting vulnerable families with a package of social services.

The Minister charged all workshop participants to maximize the opportunity in coming up mechanisms and strategies that will reflect the noble cause of ending child marriage and other harmful traditional practices within the broader agenda of safe-guarding the life of children, especially the girl child.

On behalf of the African Union Commission, Mr Nadir Fath Elalim, the Acting head of the AU Mission in Cairo, thanked the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt for accepting to host the North Africa Regional Capacity Building Workshop, stating that 'the Government of Egypt offers evidence toward the commitment of African governments in ensuring that resolutions are instituted nationally as well as at a community level'.

In a contemporary culture, where social volatility is a common occurrence, child marriage has become a dominant subject for debate. There needs to be continuous efforts to discover new directions in eradicating the practice and enhancing the prospects grounded in gender and development. Mr Elalim affirmed that, "Girls and women have the right to live free from violence and discrimination and achieve their potential and should not be forced into marriages or subjected to harmful practices that endanger their health and wellbeing.

The UNFPA Deputy Representative for Egypt, Dr. Magdi Khaled, noting that the deteriorating humanitarian situation in the region has led to increasing rates of child marriage, due a host of reasons ranging from a lack of education, increasing poverty rates and insecurity, but applauded the partnership of AU, UNICEF and UNFPA in organizing this regional training program, with a view to discussing and agreeing on strategies to end child marriage and come up with action plans for countries to implement at national level.

The UNICEF Deputy Representative for Egypt, Ms. Gillian Wilcox, also expressed her thanks to the AU and the government of Egypt for hosting the regional workshop. She stressed the importance of partnership in ending HTP and elaborated on UNICEF's partnership with the Ministry of Health and Population (MoHP) and the National Population Council (NPC) on the eradication of FGM.

About the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa

The campaign was launched at the continental level in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 29 May 2014, during the Conference of Ministers of Social Development. It aims at ending child marriage by: (i) supporting legal and policy actions in the protection and promotion of human rights, (ii) mobilizing continental awareness of the negative socio-economic impact of child marriage, (iii) building social movement and social mobilization at the grassroots and national levels; and (iv) increasing the capacity of non-state actors to undertake evidence based policy advocacy including the role of youth leadership through new media technology, monitoring and evaluation among others.

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For further information, please contact

Ms. Nena Thundu; THUNDUN@africa-union.org

Mr. Kenneth Oliko; Kennetho@africa-union.org

www.pages.au.int/cecm | www.facebook.com/OurGirlsAfrika

www.twitter.com/ourgirlsau

Media Contact:

Esther Azaa Tankou, Ag. Director of Information and Communication, African Union Commission (AUC)/ Tel: +251(0) 911361185 / E-mail: yamboue@africa-union.org

For further information:

Directorate of Information and Communication | African Union Commission | E-mail: DIC@african-union.org | Website: www.au.int | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia

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