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**African ministers set key priorities in health, population and drug control to harness the demographic dividend***Call for increased investments in young people***Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 24 March 2017-**

African Ministers met today for the statutory African Union Specialised Technical Committee meeting on Health, Population and Drug Control. The ministers from the three sectors committed to key actions needed to harness Africa's demographic dividend. It is estimated that 68% of the population in Africa is under age 30 and the African Union this year is focusing on

“harnessing the demographic dividend through investments in youth” to ensure that this majority population provides an engine for the implementation of Agenda 2063.

“We have set a clear roadmap to harness the historic opportunity of the demographic dividend to accelerate the implementation of our Agenda 2063 continental vision. We know that we have many challenges ahead but we are confident that if the concrete programme that we have put together is supported with significant investments in young people we will achieve the socio-economic and structural transformation agenda of the continent,” said Her Excellency Amira El Fadil, the Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African Union Commission.

A Ministerial panel during the meeting highlighted key recommendations for overcoming the challenges towards harnessing the demographic dividend contained in the report of their experts. Some of the key recommendations include the need for cross-sectoral coordination across relevant line ministries to develop and deliver on targeted and integrated policies for young people that cut across the health and nutrition, education, youth and culture, labour and employment sectors so that Africa can reap the demographic dividend. Updating school curricula to make education more relevant to the labour market and promoting innovation, entrepreneurship and industrialization are some of the key priorities of African Union countries. This will require policies that ensure that

young people are kept in school and provided with life-planning skills. The ministers also highlighted the urgent need to address drug use among young people and its effects including on their mental health and the need for treatment and rehabilitation. This will ensure that they contribute towards the development of the continent during their most productive years.

The meeting highlighted progress towards the setting up of the Africa Medicines Agency by 2018 with a draft treaty for its establishment being finalised. A proposal was also tabled during the meeting to establish a Fund for Africa's Pharmaceutical Development. This is urgently needed to ensure adequate funding to support current plans for pharmaceutical development in Africa. The meeting was further updated on the launch of the Africa Centres for Diseases Control and Prevention that provides a framework for the institution to support countries to improve surveillance, emergency response, and prevention of infectious diseases.

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