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President Lungu briefs African Union Assembly on progress in continental Campaign to End Child Marriage

Assembly commends ongoing efforts and urges acceleration of efforts to end Child Marriage

Addis Ababa, 3 July 2017-

The Africa Union Champion on Ending Child Marriage, His Excellency President Edgar Chagwa Lungu of Zambia presented the progress report on the Campaign to end Child Marriage to the 29th Ordinary Session of the Assembly of the African Union. The report highlights significant efforts and challenges in Member States in ending the practice



while emphasizing a number of legal and policy reforms and community mobilisation and sustained political commitment.

“Zambia continues to place importance on keeping girls in school as a key to ending child marriage. Even those who have fallen pregnant have been given the opportunity to go back to school through our re-entry policy,” said His Excellency President Edgar Lungu, “This is a strategy which we should all adopt as it will result in the empowerment of the larger African population and ultimately lead to the sustainable development for the continent” added President Lungu.

Zambia continues to make tremendous strides in the Campaign to End Child Marriage, with the prevalence rate currently standing at 31.2%, depicting a 10.8 percentage drop from the 42% at inception of the Campaign in 2014. This has been achieved through strong leadership including engagement of key stakeholders such as traditional leaders to reform traditions and customs that allow

child marriage. The country has continued to harmonize statutory and customary law on marriage to prohibit child marriage. Furthermore, Zambia is in the process of repealing a number of discriminatory and outdated statutes related to children in order to come up with a children's code to domesticate the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

In his report the President noted that the Campaign has been launched in 20 out of the targeted 30 high prevalence countries in Africa. Country launches are an essential tool to enhance increased awareness and advocacy against child marriage. These campaigns have been mostly led by Heads of State and First Ladies and involve various stakeholders including communities affected by child marriage. President Lungu reported that the Open Session on Ending Child Marriage at the AU Peace and Security Council raised awareness about the vulnerability of children during conflict situations including all forms of sexual exploitation and abuse including child marriages.

President Lungu further noted that the General Comment on Ending Child Marriage developed by the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and African Commission on Human and People's Rights is a key tool that will be used to advocate for Member States to fully implement the Provisions of the African Charter and Maputo Protocol on Ending Child Marriages. The AU is also developing a compendium of Child Marriage Laws across AU Member States as a comprehensive and accessible reference for policy makers, researchers, advocates and other stakeholders. The campaign continues to provide technical assistance to Member States and provides capacity development for various stakeholders working against child marriage. Ending Child Marriages on the continent will lay a solid foundation for the achievement of the bold aspirations of Agenda 2063, Africa's blueprint for socio-economic and structural transformation.

In its Decision on Ending Child Marriage in Africa the Assembly urged all Member States to fully implement legal instruments that empower the girl child, integrate activities and programmes on the girl child in national development frameworks and allocate adequate budgetary provisions. The Decision recommends Member States to commit to keeping the girl child in school up to tertiary level. The Decision further urges Member States that have not yet specified the minimum age of marriage to do so in line with the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. The Assembly strongly condemned the abduction and forcible marriages of young girls particularly in conflict situations and committed to prosecute the perpetrators of these vices.

The African Union launched the continent wide Campaign to End Child Marriage on 29 May 2014, with a focus on policy advocacy for the protection and promotion of human rights. The campaign seeks to accelerate change across the continent

by encouraging African governments to develop strategies to raise awareness and address the harmful impact of child marriage as well as expediting and invigorating the movement to end the practice. The campaign has supported many countries to put in place clearly defined national strategies and action plans to end the harmful practice of child marriage.

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