

**Press Release No. 121/ 2017****The African Union Nutrition Champion calls for increased investment in the Nutrition Sector across the Continent**

Addis Ababa, 22 August 2017- The King of the Kingdom of Lesotho, His Majesty King Letsie III has called on African leaders to invest in nutrition in order to address the chronic hunger and malnutrition challenges across the Continent. King Letsie who the current African Union Nutrition Champion made the remarks during a courtesy call on the AU Chairperson H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat.

“Ending malnutrition and giving children the best start in life requires more integration and sustainable investment from different sectors of our society” the Nutrition Champion stated. Lamenting that “Africa is the only region in the world where the number of stunted children has increased over the past 20 years, hence, providing the urgent need for increasing resources to improve nutrition as a vital ingredient to social development”. King Letsie reiterated his commitment and determination to continue advocating for adequate investment for the nutrition sector in Africa.

In his remarks, the AU Chairperson Moussa Faki Mahamat emphasized that “improving nutrition status is a priority area needing urgent policy attention for accelerating socio-economic development in Africa”. He pointed that malnutrition remains prevalent in the majority of African countries and represent a leading threat to the socio-economic development of the continent, hence pledging that “food security and nutrition will remain high on the African Union agenda.”

During the ceremony, H.E. Amira El Fadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs, gave an overview of the role and work of the AU Nutrition Champion and presented the 3-year Work Plan for the Nutrition Champion. *The work plan aims* to advance the implementation of the revised Africa Regional Nutrition Strategy and provides a roadmap that outlines the role of the Commission and other stakeholders in the elimination of hunger and malnutrition in Africa. Amongst other things, the Nutrition Champion is expected to promote the AU's *Africa Renewed Initiative for Stunting Elimination in Africa* (ARISE) and advocate for increased investment in nutrition which will include private sector engagement in nutrition initiatives, that build on the Cost of Hunger in Africa Studies. The Champion will also render support to the AUC Chairperson's initiative to address nutrition in areas of conflict and with humanitarian needs and support the Commission's endorsed “*Sustainable School Food*

and Nutrition Initiative” in order to scale up continental school feeding programs in partnership with FAO.

In their determination to eliminate hunger, malnutrition and famine on the continent, African leaders have adopted a number of declarations, strategies and commitments such as the establishment of the African Task Force on Food and Nutrition Development, the Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP) under the NEPAD initiatives which committed African Leaders to appropriate 10% of their national budgets to agriculture. The Commission also has other initiatives such as *Africa Renewed Initiative for Stunting Elimination in Africa* (ARISE) which is geared towards having nutrition high on the development agenda of the continent by building awareness and fostering political commitment as well as resources to stunting elimination based on the results generated from the Cost of Hunger in Africa Studies.

Additionally, African Heads of State and Government appointed His Majesty King Letsie III of the Kingdom of Lesotho as AU Nutrition Champion in 2014 and renewed mandate for another two years, which ends in 2019.

Media Enquiry:

Mr. Wurie Bah | CARMMA Communication Expert | Department of Social Affairs | E-mail: bahw@africa-union.org | Tel: | www.au.int | Addis Ababa | Ethiopia | web

For further information:

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

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