



African Union Commission



Republic of Côte d'Ivoire

Third Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration

Yamoussoukro, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire
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JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

Third Conference of African Ministers on CRVS ends with a call for a Decade on Civil Registration 2015-2024

Yamoussoukro, Republic of Côte d'Ivoire: Ministers from African countries have agreed to launch a Decade of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS), covering 2015 to 2024, with the goal of “leaving no child out” and “no country behind” in the effort to register all births and vital events in Africa. The ministerial meeting took place on 12 and 13 February 2015 *at the Fondation Houphouët-Boigny pour la recherche et la Paix in Yamoussoukro, Republic of Cote d'Ivoire.*

The engagement by the Ministers forms part of detailed recommendations arising from the conference. These include strengthening the capacity of the Secretariat of the Africa Programme on improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS); establishing strong links with the health sector to improve registration of births and deaths including improving death and causes of death information at country level ; establishing strong linkages between civil registration and national identity systems; and developing guidelines for mainstreaming gender issues in CRVS systems and for managing CRVS in conflict and emergency situations.

This is the third conference since Ministers first met in Addis Ababa in 2010, and is the first time the conference has been hosted by the African Union Commission (AUC) under the African Union standing mechanism which simultaneously increased both the status of this forum and that of CRVS reform.

The conference theme of *“Promoting the use of civil registration and vital statistics in support of good governance in Africa”* recognized the significance of CRVS as a tool to facilitate development with all that entails, from honoring human rights starting with the right to identity, to enhancing economic opportunity and Africa’s commitment to regional integration. This is particularly pertinent as we near the post-2015 agenda, and many African governments have been unable to meet or monitor the Millennium Development Goals as a result of a lack of vital statistics from civil registration systems, especially in the area of infant and maternal health.

HE Dr Nkosazana Dlamini Zuma, Chairperson of the AUC comments:

“The conference acknowledged the role of CRVS as a prerequisite for the continent’s development and inclusive growth, a message which was well received and understood by the government officials present.

“This is the first time the AUC has hosted the conference, but we continue to work with our trusted partners in its organization. All partners to this conference have laid strong foundations over several years to form a really solid core of expertise and enthusiasm on CRVS for Africa. CRVS should form an integral part of the post-2015 development agenda in order to address inclusive and sustainable development in Africa and agenda 2063 which calls for a united, prosperous and peaceful Africa. The recommendation of the ministers to declare the coming decade 2015-2024 as the decade for repositioning CRVS in Africa is a commendable initiative.”

In order to strengthen CRVS systems in Africa, it will be key to embrace and harness appropriate and available technologies. With this in mind, global child-rights organization Plan International, on behalf of the APAI-CRVS Core Group, announced at the conference the work being conducted to produce a Guidebook on CRVS Digitization for Africa.

“This manual will complement and update existing documentation to give countries a step-by-step, flexible guide to help them find the right technological solution to CRVS digitization, taking into account country context and existing infrastructure. Taking a solution from one country and trying to make it fit in another country almost always leads to failure, as does simply taking a manual process and automating it,” said Ed Duffus, Plan’s Digital Birth Registration Manager.

“Digitizing CRVS systems is now no longer an option – it is a necessity in order to make these systems more efficient so governments have the most reliable data possible on their populations, which in turn will lead to improved service delivery and increased protection of human rights.”

The first version of the guidebook will be launched in September 2015 and will be a live document available online so that once published, it will continue to grow and develop based on input from relevant stakeholders.

The conference also renewed commitments to child rights in the context of CRVS. The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child launched their General Comment 2 on Article 6 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, drafted with input from UNICEF, Plan International and the APAI-CRVS secretariat based at UNECA. This recognizes and gives meaning and scope to three interlinked rights namely: the right to a name, the right to birth registration, and the right to a nationality.

Mark Hereward, Deputy Regional Director, UNICEF Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office (ESARO) observes:

“The comment on Article 6 of the African Children’s Charter explores the indivisibility of child rights in the context of birth registration, in particular its impact on issues such as justice for children; prevention of harmful practices; the rights to health, education and social welfare; the

right to parental care and protection; the rights of children with disabilities; the obligation to prevent statelessness; and the prevention of abuses such as recruitment into the armed forces, sexual exploitation, child labour, human trafficking, early marriage, and disinheritance.

“In other words, it testifies to what UNICEF advocates for every day: the indivisibility of child rights and the interplay between birth registration and access to and the denial of human rights. From the obvious, such as the fact a birth certificate is itself a human right – the right to identity – to the more complex, such as the fact the absence of a birth certificate makes a child “invisible” and therefore it is harder for that child to access services, and easier for the child to be married too young, exploited in child labour, or trafficked.”

UNICEF, Plan International and the African Union Commission renew the call for greater investment in comprehensive, effective and rights-based CRVS systems in Africa to ensure every African is counted because every African counts.

Raj Gautam Mitra of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (that hosts APAI-CRVS Secretariat) comments:

“As a Regional CRVS Core Group, we take great pride in the milestones realized by the regional initiative: and more so in the commitment demonstrated by African countries to the implementation of the priorities of the regional programme particularly in respect to undertaking comprehensive assessments of CRVS systems and the development of national plans of action, as prioritized by the second conference of ministers in 2012, in Durban, South Africa. It is also worth noting the capacity that has been built on the subject at national level particularly through the assessment processes.

While noting that remarkable achievements have been made, we recognize the enormous work that lies ahead in attaining the ultimate vision of these initiatives, which is not only to make everyone visible, but to deliver the standards of living and quality of life deserved by every member of our population

Background note

The Third Ministerial Conference was held in Yamoussoukro, Cote d'Ivoire from 9-13 February 2015 under the theme “*Promoting the use of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in support of Good Governance in Africa*”. African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration, Ministers of Health, Heads of Civil Registration Offices (CROs) and National Statistics Offices (NSOs), representatives of regional and international organizations, concerned UN agencies, and representatives of Non-Governmental Organizations participated.

The First Ministerial meeting was held in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia in August 2010 and recognized the importance of CRVS and identified it as one of the continent's key development imperatives. Following the ministers' resolutions, African Heads of State and Government in their 2012 African Union summit institutionalized the ministerial conference as statutory body of the AUC and directed the conference to report on progress and challenges to the summit every two years.

At the Second Conference of African Ministers responsible for Civil Registration held in Durban, South Africa in September 2012, ministers re-iterated the continuing importance of CRVS in advancing Africa's development agenda, including accelerating regional integration, attaining the priorities of the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD); an African Union strategic framework for pan-African socio-economic development, and meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Among the key outcomes of the Durban meeting were (a) the endorsement of the APAI-CRVS that provided the policy and programmatic framework for implementation of CRVS on the continent; and (b) the decision

that all countries will undertake comprehensive assessments of CRVS systems and prepare costed national plans irrespective of the state of development of their systems.

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