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DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

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### African Union Commission hosts the Global Summit to Tackle Online Child Sexual Exploitation



**Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 11 December 2019:** The development and expansion of digital technologies has brought invaluable opportunities for young people to learn, socialize and communicate. However, it has also provided offenders with increased opportunities – and a range of new capabilities – to abuse children on a mass scale. This is reflected in the exponential increase in online child sexual exploitation, which leaves a devastating and lasting impact upon children everywhere. Online child sexual exploitation is a global crime that demands a global response. Rocketing global internet access in Africa, Asia and the Middle East has brought with it many opportunities, but it has also led to more children than ever being exploited online in these parts of the world.

Against this background, the Global Summit to Tackle Online Child Sexual Exploitation (OCSE) which was co-hosted by the African Union Commission (AUC) Department of Social Affairs, in partnership with other stakeholders, including WePROTECT Global Alliance and the UK Government kicked off today.

The main objectives of the summit include: raising attention and enhance understanding of online child sexual exploitation amongst high-level decision makers. It is also expected to be a platform to hear from political leaders, senior representatives from international organizations and subject-matter experts on the threat, and launching a range of key products, including

a new Global Threat Assessment and Strategic Global Response to inform the global response to online child sexual exploitation.

Across the two-day event, delegates will be provided with the knowledge, tools and networks required to understand the nature and prevalence of online child sexual exploitation, and the means to implement a strategic global response.

The meeting brings together high-level representatives of governments, the private sector/ industry, civil society organisations (CSOs), regional mechanisms/ entities, and specialized agencies of the United Nations.

The Guest of Honour at the Opening Ceremony of the Global Summit was H.E. Sahle-Work Zewde, President of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia who welcomed the participants of the Summit on behalf of the government and people of Ethiopia. She reiterated the importance of the forum in order to promote a common understanding on OCSE related issues. She underlined that no society is immune from this virus and noted the importance of collective efforts to prevent our children from OCSE.



Addressing the opening ceremony of the meeting, Her Excellency Amira Elfadil, African Union Commissioner for Social Affairs emphasized that the Global Summit on OCSE takes place at a time the world is facing a transnational crime of enormous proportions. “Internet connectivity and usage has continued to expand rapidly in Africa and though this has brought great social and economic benefits to the region, it has also exposed children to greater risk of Online Child Sexual Exploitation”, the Commissioner for Social Affairs emphasised.

The Commissioner noted that the African Union (AU) is committed to providing political leadership needed to push forward the agenda for the health and well-being of Africa’s citizens. Policy organs of the AU have been proactive and forward looking in promoting the rights and welfare of its citizens from Online Child Sexual Exploitation. The Commissioner further noted the adoption of the AU Convention on Cyber Security and Personal Data Protection, in June 2014, in Malabo, Equatorial Guinea, which seeks to galvanise political commitment by African States to take measures on a range of issues, including cybersecurity and cybercrime. “We have also been raising the awareness of our Member States to build their capacity to develop national action plans and take action to address the problem. All our efforts are linked to relevant continental and international strategic policies and frameworks including; the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention; Malabo Convention; and Agenda 2063 which is Africa’s blue Print for Social and economic transformation” underlined Amira Elfadil.

The Commissioner concluded by urging partners present in the meeting to help the AU Commission to carry forward the agenda to protect children by saying “There is still a lot of need gaps that should be addressed and Member States are just picking up momentum based on current project. The presence of 48 member states with 24 ministers in attendance can attest to the interest and concerns in tackling OCSE. The



African Union is open and welcomes sustainable mutually beneficial partnerships to carry forward the agenda to protect our children”.



During the opening ceremony, Baroness Joanna Shields, Founder of WePROTECT Global Alliance and Former UK Minister for Internet Safety & Security from 2015-17, and current CEO of the company BenevolentAI, urged participants of the Global Summit to Tackle OCSE by putting this urgent issue in the forefront of the global agenda and to work together to combat it for future generations. She emphasized the importance of actions by global, regional organizations and governments to treat OCSE the same way as preventing an epidemic from spreading.

The opening ceremony was also addressed by Mr Ernie Allen, Chairperson of WePROTECT Global Alliance. He noted that the Global Threat Assessment 2019 will be considered at the the Summit. “The experience of survivors must be at the heart of our response” emphasized Mr. Allen.

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