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African Union Commission Reinforces Commitment to Combat Drug Control Challenges with New Initiatives and Strategic Partnerships



In a pivotal effort to tackle the escalating drug control challenges across the continent, the African Union (AU) Commission has announced a series of new initiatives aimed at bolstering drug prevention, treatment, and control efforts. These were unveiled during the Fifth Ordinary Session of the AU Specialised Technical Committee on Health, Nutrition, Population, and Drug Control (STC-HNPDC-5), held from 5-9 August 2024 in Addis Ababa.

H.E. Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma, AU Commissioner for Health, Humanitarian Affairs, and Social Development, underscored the critical need for a coordinated and comprehensive drug control strategy. She highlighted the increasing public health crisis associated with substance abuse, particularly affecting vulnerable groups like

youth, women, and children. "We are witnessing an exponential rise in drug use disorders across the continent, which calls for immediate and strategic interventions," said Amb. Cessouma.

One of the key outcomes of the STC-HNPDC-5 Drug Control deliberations included the establishment of the Southern Africa Network of Traditional Leaders in Drug Demand Reduction. Launched as a pilot initiative in Johannesburg, South Africa, in April 2024, the network integrates traditional leaders into the broader drug control framework, enhancing community-level prevention and care interventions.

"The integration of traditional leaders into our drug control strategies is a significant milestone. Their influence at the community level is crucial in broadening the reach and effectiveness of our prevention and treatment programs," remarked Prof. Julio Rakotonirina, Director for Health and Humanitarian Affairs at the African Union Commission.

Furthermore, the extension of the African Union Plan of Action on Drug Control and Crime Prevention (2019-2023) by two years, to 2025 was endorsed. This extension addresses time lost during the COVID-19 pandemic and reaffirms the AU's dedication to meeting the plan's core objectives.

"This extension reflects our unwavering commitment to addressing the multifaceted challenges of drug control and crime prevention in Africa. We must continue to innovate and collaborate to achieve our goals," said H.E. Amb. Minata Samate Cessouma.

An additional significant achievement of the STC-HNPDC-5 Drug Control sessions was the endorsement of the First African Union Youth Forum Declaration on Drug Use Prevention (2023), marking the AU's recognition of the pivotal role of youth in combating drug abuse. The declaration reflects a collective commitment to empowering young Africans in shaping a drug-free future.

The AU Commission also highlighted the importance of data-driven drug control strategies, urging Member States to fund national drug epidemiological surveillance networks to improve the monitoring of synthetic drug supply and demand. This effort will support the work of the Pan-African Epidemiology Network on Drug Use (PAENDU), which plays a critical role in generating actionable data for policy formulation and operational responses.

"We call on all AU Member States to invest in these surveillance networks. Accurate and timely data is essential for effective drug control strategies, and we must equip ourselves with the tools needed to combat this growing threat," stressed Prof. Rakotonirina.

The AU Commission's comprehensive approach to drug control also includes the development of a new framework to replace the current Plan of Action, covering the period 2026-2030. This forthcoming plan will continue to prioritize the health and well-

being of Africa's populations, particularly focusing on the prevention and treatment of substance use disorders.

For further information please contact:

Mr. Derrick Ochuot | Strategic Communication Expert | Directorate of Health and Humanitarian Affairs | Health Systems, Diseases and Nutrition Division | African Union Commission | E-mail: ochuotd@africa-union.org | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Ms. Whitney Mwangi | Health Policy Communications and Advocacy Specialist, Directorate of Health and Humanitarian Affairs | Department of Health, Humanitarian Affairs and Social Development, African Union Commission | E-mail: WhitneyM@africa-union.org | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Ms. Faith Adhiambo | Communications Officer, Directorate of Information and Communication, African Union Commission E-Mail: OchiengJ@africa-union.org

Information and Communication Directorate, African Union Commission | E-mail: DIC@africa-union.org | Web: au.int | Addis Ababa, Ethiopia | **Follow Us:** [Facebook](#) | [Twitter](#) | [Instagram](#) | [YouTube](#)