

AFRICAN UNION

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STATEMENT

BY

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Day of the
AFRICAN
CHILD
2013

The logo features the text 'Day of the African Child 2013' in a stylized font. 'AFRICAN' is in red, 'CHILD' is in green, and '2013' is in red. A yellow map of Africa is positioned to the right of the word 'CHILD'. The entire logo is set against a white background with a faint map of Africa, all enclosed within a circular frame of green laurel branches and a yellow arc at the bottom.

Theme: "Protecting Children against Harmful Social and Cultural Practices: Our collective responsibility"

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA

14TH JUNE 2013

Protocol

It is my pleasure to welcome you to another celebration of the Day of the African Child, which is now an annual event commemorated across the continent. I also wish to recognize the presence of major stakeholders, which is indicative of the significance attached to the welfare and wellbeing of the continent's children.

As most of you are aware, the celebration of the Day of the African Child (which is actually on 16th June) stems from the dark and dreadful days of Apartheid; a system that deliberately constructed a morally bankrupt socio-economic and political edifice that ignored justice, respect for human dignity, freedom and liberty, and indeed the rights and welfare of children. The system represented and pursued violence, oppression and absolute segregation as tools and options of governance and dominance. The brutal and bestial repression of the 1976 Soweto uprisings did not only shocked the world, it also revealed how boundless the system was prepared to go (including massacre of children) in order to sustain an already discredited and unsustainable supremacist structure that served the interest of the few as opposed to the majority.

Today, as we celebrate this day with a well-chosen theme to guide us "Eliminating Harmful Social and Cultural Practices Affecting Children: Our Collective Responsibility" we are reminded that the continent's children are still not out of the woods. They continue to endure violence, humiliations and other attendant ills perpetrated by and in the interest of the few in the name of cruel age-old traditions that have lost meaning and relevance. We are also reminded to wake up and ensure that necessary and urgent steps are taken to eradicate injurious, violence oriented and harmful socio-cultural practices against the continent's children. In moving against such evils of society, opposition is bound to rise to slow our pace and to even prevent us from reaching our goals. Nevertheless, as Apartheid crumbled before our very eyes, so also would the stinging and harmful practices, which would allow our children to grow without, fear and limitations.

ARISE!

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We also want to send a clear message on this day that we are not against noble traditional practices and culture that sustain and enrich society: We value and appreciate them and we want our children to know, understand and apply them. We also want to ensure that those meaningful and honorable practices are not discarded but preserved for generations yet come. However, just as we are against new and toxic ideas and influences that are negatively affecting our children, so also we must be opposed to old and injurious socio- cultural traditions that have gnawing effects on our children

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me to use this occasion to inform you about what the African Union is doing in this regard. We have committed ourselves to protect the human rights of women, girls and children, to promote positive cultural values and to celebrate the fight against harmful traditional practices. In October 2011, the Department of Social Affairs convened a Pan African Conference in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on Celebrating Courage and Overcoming Harmful Traditional Practices (HTP) in Africa. The conference shared views on both the negative and positive aspects of traditional practices and acknowledged actions and efforts of various actors to eliminate HTP. Among the main recommendations of the conference was that the African Union should urge Governments to domesticate key legislative instruments for combating HTP.

Furthermore, we are currently preparing a monitoring and evaluating framework to collect necessary data from member states that are geared to track progress on efforts made in putting in place legal frameworks and to ensure that member states are implementing policies and programmes against harmful traditional practices.

For this year's celebrations, five areas of concern and intervention have been identified: preventing and/or addressing violence against children, harmonization of laws, emphasis on institution frameworks, collaboration between various stakeholders and the need for data collection and research. These measures must go in tandem with the

efforts of Governments, which are expected to pay more attention to additional areas and to their specific situations of particular importance to combat harmful practices in compliance with the African children's Charter and other relevant instruments.

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me conclude by expressing the Commission's utmost gratitude and appreciation to our partners for their continued commitment to combating HTP and for their support toward the organization of this year's celebrations. We cherish and acknowledge the synergy produced; a true illustration of our mutual partnership against HTP and a demonstration of our avowed and firmed pledge to achieve the necessary goals to make Africa truly fit for children.

Thank you for your kind attention and hope that we would have made major gains by the time we convene next year to celebrate another Day of the African Child.



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