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AUC – UNESCO Joint-Celebration of the International Day of Education

24th January 2019

AU Headquarters, Addis Ababa

OPENING REMARKS

H.E. Prof. Sarah Anyang Agbor

Commissioner for Human Resources, Science & Technology

African Union Commission

**Representative of the Nigerian Ambassador,
Representative of UNICEF, UNFPA, UNESCO, Save the Children
International, USAID
Representative of Ethiopian Evangelical Church and ofcourse our
dynamic pupils here, AU Stakeholders
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Thank you very much Ms. Wincate Muthini for the brilliant presentation.

I am pleased to welcome you all to the headquarters of the African Union and make opening remarks at this AUC – UNESCO Joint-Celebration of the International Day of Education. Allow me to begin by extending the well wishes from the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, H.E. Dr. Moussa Faki Mahamat to all Educational Stakeholders. Also, honoured appreciation goes to the UNESCO Addis Ababa Liaison Office for co-organizing such important event, with the African Union Commission and making sure that we join other voices across the world to celebrate this very important day. As Nelson Mandela said; “Education is the most powerful weapon which you can use to change the world”.

Education at all levels has to be strengthened by enhanced access, relevance, and quality so that the continent can benefit from empowered citizens and better quality and skilled human resources for the attainment of Sustainable Development Goals and Africa’s Agenda 2063. Significantly, Education is what you know and not what is in the book. Learning expands great souls. An Ethiopian proverb says; “He who learns, teaches”. It is increasingly evident that Education is a key to achieving all global development goals and aspirations of Africans as articulated in Agenda

2063. That is why The African Union and UNESCO agreed on the theme: *Education, “A Key Driver for Inclusion and Empowerment”*.

Africa needs an education development programme that would address education holistically to ensure that the human resource and intellectual capacity gaps are filled and achieve continued progress towards sustainable equitable development. Remember an African proverb says; “If you think education is expensive, try ignorance”. Investing in education, science and technology is crucial to be able to meet Africa’s own development targets, and reverse marginalization in the world economy.

My departmental Mandate is to consolidate Education, Science and Technology and the empowerment of youth for sustainable development.

The African Union Commission adopted the Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) 2016-2025, a domestication of the global SDG4, to provide a continental policy framework to re-orient education and training to ensure that it empowers our youthful populations, and imbues them with not just technical skills and competences, but also appropriate African values for responsible citizenship; critical thinking and entrepreneurial mindsets that will enhance the potential for innovation and job creation. CESA also addresses the need for responsive curricula that are aligned to development vision and resource endowments of the continent. It highlights the need to strengthen linkages with industry and the world of work, as well as take advantage of digitization to optimize employability. Education has to deliberately contribute to peaceful societies and individuals, and must be protected during emergency and humanitarian situations. The issue of school safety must be addressed through multi-sectoral coordination in

Member States, bringing together, for example, ministries responsible for education and those responsible for internal security and defence.

Education is a fundamental human right. Legally, every individual across the world is entitled to a free elementary education. Girl education is also an area where more need to be done in Africa to ensure that African women are well educated and are empowered for African development. The commission has developed a framework to enhance access of girls and their retention at school. Through CESA, AU Member States have committed to ensuring that all children attain at least completion of secondary level education which includes skills training, incorporating STEM education and vocational training relevant to current and prospective employment opportunities.

The Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union declared 2019 as “The Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaced Persons: Towards Durable Solutions to Forced Displacement in Africa”. It is therefore essential to consider the place of education in preventing or mitigating conflict and humanitarian situations that lead to displacement. It is said that; “Education makes a people easy to lead but difficult to drive, easy to govern but impossible to enslave”.

According to a recent report by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), only 61 per cent of refugee children attend primary school, compared with a global average of 92 %. Just 23 per cent of refugee children are enrolled in secondary school, compared to 84 % globally. Only 1% of refugees get access to higher education, compared to 37 % globally.

Over a third of the world's forcibly displaced persons are found in Africa, including 6.3 million refugees and 14.5 million internally displaced persons. Ms. Wincate Muthini and Mr. Kofi Selam Azasoo questions resonate our questions and there is need to capitalise on our youthful bulge. How can we ensure for ourselves that what we are doing is beneficial to the Africans? Promoting access to education is essential to enable refugees build their capacity to lead a normal life and contribute to regional integration and sustainable development in Africa. There is a need for more vigorous attention to enhance opportunities to effectively educate and integrate refugees and displaced persons. Programmes like School Feeding are essential tools for ensuring that all children access schooling and are able to succeed. It is therefore imperative that countries hosting large numbers of refugees are assisted to enhance the capacity of their education systems, including for example, classrooms, the teaching corps, school feeding among others.

The African Teacher has a special place in Africa's development, as she or he has the mandate and responsibility to ensure that transmission of knowledge and skills is not at the expense of values and the development of the whole human being. The new AU Teacher Award will help to raise the profile and status of the teacher. We are in the process of developing continental standards and guidelines for the teaching profession, as well as continental teacher qualification framework that will help ensure the highest possible standards for the teaching profession. Member States need to demonstrate their value of teachers by improving the training and working conditions of teachers, and encouraging high performing students to join the teaching career.

Partnership between UNESCO and the African Union is essential because of our shared goals, objectives and target Member States. I am pleased to note that my department is working with UNESCO to harmonise the reporting framework for CESA and SDG 4, so that Member States will report once to the AU Education Observatory, from which UNESCO will obtain the education data. This is essential in promoting efficiency, accuracy and promoting African ownership of African data. Member States are called upon to facilitate alignment of the global and continental agenda by establishing AU Education focal points within the National Commissions to UNESCO.

Let me conclude by giving you the assurance that the African Union Commission will provide all possible support for the development of education in Africa and for the success of our joint initiatives with UNESCO and UNICEF.

There is immense potential in the spirit of Ubuntu; if we support one another.

I wish you all fruitful discussions.

A Happy, Prosperous New Year 2019 to you all.

Thank you for your kind attention.