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**AFRICAN UNION CONTINENTAL TECHNICAL EXPERTS  
CONSULTATION ON ENDING ONLINE CHILD SEXUAL  
EXPLOITATION, ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA,  
6-8 MARCH 2018**

**OPENING REMARKS  
BY MRS CISSE MARIAMA MOHAMED  
DIRECTOR, DEPARTMENT OF SOCIAL AFFAIRS,  
AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

- **Mr Paul Stanfield**, Director, Organized and Emerging Crime, INTERPOL General Secretariat and also a Board Member of WeProtect Global Alliance
- **Dr Alastair McPhail**, CMG OBE, British Ambassador to Ethiopia, and UK Permanent Representative to the African Union
- **Mr Iain Drennan**, Head of the International Team, Tackling Exploitation and Abuse Unit, Serious Organised Crime Group, UK Home Office and Board Member of WeProtect Global Alliance
- **Excellencies**, Ambassadors of AU Member States here present
- **Honourable Lucia Witbooi**, Deputy Minister, Gender Equality and Child Welfare, Republic of Namibia
- **Distinguished Experts** from Member States,
- **Stakeholder Partners**,
- **Ladies and Gentlemen**,

It is an honour and great privilege for me to welcome you all to this first African Union Continental Consultation on combatting Online Child Sexual Exploitation in Africa. I extend a special greetings from the Commissioner for Social Affairs, H.E Amira Elfadil who very much wanted to be part of this consultation were it not for other equally important engagements elsewhere.

### **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

Allow me to make a little reflection on the Great Scientist, Isaac Newton's third Law of Motion which says "**For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction**". In layman's terms, for every action to do good, there are forces that work to spoil it and that is why we have counterfeits.

Internet usage in African countries has increased significantly over the years. No one can deny that the Internet has been an extraordinary catalyst for innovation, education, and economic growth in the region, and perhaps none will benefit more from it than our children. But while we are rejoicing that this increase in internet usage has boosted social and economic development, the downside is that it has led to greater risk of our children being sexually exploited online.

### **Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

The rise of information and communication technologies has made it easier and more efficient for sex offenders to: produce, access, and distribute child sexual abuse materials; find like-minded offenders; groom children; while reducing the risk of detection.

It has never been easier for perpetrators to make contact with children, share images of abuse and inspire each other to commit further crimes.

This has led to a global proliferation of materials posted or transmitted online that depict sexual abuse of children or focus on their genitalia. Sexual abuse and torture, perpetrated against children offline, is now shared online via photos, videos, movies, and live sex shows.

Online child sexual exploitation of children is expanding across the globe in line with development of Internet connectivity. Africa certainly is not immune to this crime and trends suggest that no country on the continent is safe. Internet connectivity is expanding rapidly in Africa and with it online Child Sexual Exploitation though much about its actual prevalence and scale remains unknown. Online Child Sexual Exploitation is not a problem that Africa can afford to ignore, it is rather a challenge that calls us to action and that is why we are gathered here today.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen,**

If ever there was a time that Africa needed to act with urgency to address this threat, it is now. A combination of factors point to its likely explosion in Africa if timely measures are not put in place. These factors include the rapidly increasing internet coupled with the lack of awareness of the threat as well as poverty that increases African children's vulnerability to it. There is also currently limited awareness and understanding amongst Government and policy makers within Africa on this issue. Some do not see OCSE as a priority. Even though there are ongoing efforts to

address the problem in Africa, overall progress on the continent has been slow and a lot more still needs to be done. This is despite Member States having committed to protect the rights children to live free from sexual exploitation and abuse through ratifications of relevant international and regional treaties as well as adopting Sustainable Development Goals which include among their targets ending all sexual violence against children by 2030.

### **Distinguished ladies and gentlemen**

You are gathered here for the next two and a half days to deliberate on Online Child Sexual Exploitation as an emergent form of Cybercrime. By the end of this Consultation, the expectation from the African Union is that a clear way forward will be forged at the continental and country levels.

This consultation is organized under the auspices of the African Union project to “**Strengthen regional and national capacity and action against Online Child Sexual Exploitation in Africa**” which is funded by the Government of the United Kingdom, through the Commonwealth Fund.

As I conclude, allow me to convey our sincere gratitude to all organisations that have been instrumental in supporting this event. Special appreciation to the UK Home Office for the excellent collaboration and financing of the project. Special thanks to WeProtect Global Alliance, UNICEF, ECPAT International, Internet Watch Foundation, UNICEF and UNODC.

Indeed you have a busy schedule ahead of you. But as the old proverb goes "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy" and by inference also Jill. Therefore, I hope that you will find some time during your stay here to explore and experience the rich culture of this Great nation of Ethiopia. Ethiopians have one of the richest, most well-preserved cultures in the world.

**Let me now end my remarks by wishing you a delightful and stimulating consultation.**

**I thank you.**