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Economic Commission for Africa

**5th Conference of Africa Ministers responsible for Civil
Registration**

Speech by

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Expert Group Meeting

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Representatives of UN agencies

CRVS Core Group

Ladies and Gentlemen, all protocols observed

On behalf of ECA, it gives me great pleasure to be here in Lusaka at the meeting of Experts that is preceding the 5th conference of ministers responsible of CRVS on the theme “*Innovative Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems: Foundation for Legal Identity Management*”. Let me begin by thanking the Government of the Republic of Zambia for hosting the 5th Conference of Ministers responsible for CRVS. Everyone is looking forward to experiencing the warm hospitality and rich culture, which Zambia is known for.

I wish to welcome delegates who have travelled the lengths and breadths of world to come to this significant conference. I am delighted to inform you that this is the largest COM we have had, with over 600 registered delegates. We have recorded increases in all categories of delegates and I wish to thank those who have contributed financially to this huge turnout.

Let me acknowledge our valued partners, the African Union Commission and the African Development Bank for making this conference possible. To our valued partners in the CRVS Regional Core Group and our sponsors for this conference, we are very grateful for their role in bringing the participants together once more this year to deliberate and chart the way forward for CRVS systems strengthening.

I wish also to acknowledge the contribution of the Core Group and the APAI-CRVS Secretariat for engaging in a consultative process that yielded the theme of the conference that addresses the current issues in CRVS. The choice of theme was guided and based on following premise:

- Civil registration function remains pivotal to registration systems and the key to unlock legal identity.

- The call by the Deputy Secretary General of the United Nations to reduce the identity gap by 300 million by 2025, a mammoth but achievable task if we address the challenges of our registration systems.
- Digitalization: Innovation and Technological Solutions-Digitalization as a facilitator of CRVS.

Ladies and Gentlemen; We have gathered here for COM5 with an expanded mandate and with the full acknowledgement that civil registration is the foundation of legal identity - a universal requirement for SDG16.9 to “*provide legal identity for all, including birth registration*”. It also needs to harness the dividends of digitalization.

Digital ID can provide enormous benefits. However, in many countries the identification process tends to be fragmented. There is a lack of coordination between civil registration and identity as well as multiple overlapping and incompatible identity systems. Global Institute estimates that for emerging economies, if improvements are made in a coordinated and holistic way using Digital ID for authentication alone could lead to average potential per-country benefit of roughly 6 percent of GDP in 2030.

In Africa, half of the population is not registered at birth, which renders most of the region's poor unseen, uncounted and excluded, and by extension, affects their ability to enjoy universal rights. In our endeavour to support member States to address this gap and in achieving target 16.9 by 2030, the participation of the government ministries and departments at COM5 has been expanded, to include those that deal with national identity registration, ICT and E-Governance.

Ladies and gentlemen, we are moving into a new era where the fundamental principle is that civil registration systems should serve as the basis for lifetime identification of individuals through universal recording of life events from births to deaths that present ‘entry into’ and ‘exit from’ identity management system, respectively. Integrated and interoperable civil registration and national ID management systems form foundational legal identity necessary for proof of multiple functional identity registers. So, our civil registration systems should be accessible, inclusive and integrative. A holistic and integrated approach on civil registration, vital statistics including cause of death and identity management helps to build

a robust and sustainable legal identity system, strengthens the health system, prevents duplication of efforts, save resources and time, and allows efficient public service delivery. Furthermore, such holistic civil registration system needs, inevitably, to be technologically enabled to ensure systematic integration of the process with other parts of government; thereby ensuring efficient use of the information produced.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I wish to reiterate that CRVS is an essential administrative system in modern society. The civil registry provides individuals with legal documents required to secure their identity, nationality, civil rights and access to social services. Well-functioning CRVS systems are crucial for creating inclusive societies, ensuring proper delivery of public services and protecting basic human rights. For example, the birth registration certificate, as a legal document and proof of age, helps to prevent violations of child rights, including child marriage, child labour and trafficking, and the use of child soldiers in conflict zones. Thus, CRVS systems have a critical and central role in making Africans visible, protecting their human rights and reducing inequalities affecting them.

Unfortunately, many of the civil registration and identification systems are fragmented and under-resourced. The legal and regulatory framework around Civil Registration, is many cases quite dated and needs to be harmonized with new laws and regulation for Digital ID, which requires Privacy, Data Protection (including Cybersecurity) and e-Transactions. There is also need to develop road-maps with a practical approach to achieving a Digital ID and Civil Registration system.

ECA as the secretariat of the APAI-CRVS, we would like to register significant progress in the implementation of the Programme. Let me mention some few examples, and in one of the sessions we will provide you with a detailed report of the achievements since the Nouakchott Conference in 2017.

- Most of the resolutions of the Nouakchott Declaration have been operationalised, most notably the development of improved tools for strengthening CRVS processes. Africa CRVS Day has been celebrated for 2 consecutive years.

- Staffing levels of the Secretariat have improved, although not to the optimal level. Thanks to the partners and UN entities who have contributed to the improvement.
- The APAI-CRVS Secretariat is working with partners in the development of common information communication technology assets to support effective civil registration and vital statistics systems across Africa.
- The issues of refugees were noted in the Nouakchott Declaration and we have given it prominence in this conference and acknowledge the theme of the year of the African Union.
- Over two-thirds of the countries in Africa have conducted Comprehensive Assessments, thus demonstrating their commitment to strengthen their national CRVS systems implementing the one of the recommendations of the 2nd Conference of Ministers responsible for CR. The APAI-CRVS programme is country-driven, with oversight by our Ministers responsible for Civil Registration.

Ladies and Gentlemen, as I conclude, let me take this opportunity to applaud our development partners and the private sector that are working on the continent. We commend for the work you are doing but we could achieve more, if we can collaborate and harmonize our approaches. The APAI-CRVS Costed Strategic Plan 2017-2021, with the vision of *Everyone Visible in Africa*, offers that platform for collaboration and it defines the road map for the Africa Programme and its secretariat to drive sound reform in the first five years of the African civil registration and vital statistics decade. I am sure if we all combine our efforts and we speak with one voice in the various countries that we work in, we will reap the multiplier effects of collaboration.

Finally, I would like to assure you of ECA's commitment to strengthen the CRVS and ID management processes in member states as well as in ensuring that *No One is left Behind*, and we achieve the aspirations of agenda 2063, the *Africa We want and the 2030 Development Agenda*. The APAI-CRVS Secretariat stands ready to provide technical support the member states.

I wish you a fruitful discussion in the next three days.

I thank you for listening.