

**Fourteenth CSO Forum on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the
Child**

15 – 17 March 2019: Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

“Humanitarian Action in Africa: Children’s Rights First”

**Communique to the 33rd Ordinary Session of the African Committee of Experts
on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC)**

Adopted on 17 March 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Firstly, we would like to express our sincere condolences for the passing of Hon.
Mohammed Hmeyada. His contributions will be missed.

We would like to welcome Hon. Hermine Kembo to the Committee and we look forward
to working with you throughout your tenure.

A. PREAMBLE

We, the 113 participants of the Fourteenth CSO Forum, made up of National Human Rights Institutions, Civil society organizations from the five regions in Africa, Pan-African Institutions and International Non- Governmental Organizations, met in Addis Ababa from 15-17 March 2019 and discussed child rights issues, under the theme “**Humanitarian Action in Africa: Children’s Rights First**”.

Reaffirming the principles of the rights and welfare of the child contained in the legal and political framework of the African Union (AU), in particular the Agenda 2063, Agenda 2040 and the global development framework, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs);

Commending the Committee for this standing slot in its Sessions and implementing some of our past recommendations

Recognizing the invaluable contribution and potential of National Human Rights Institutions (NHRIs) in Africa as key partners of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and the Civil Society movement in Africa in securing the rights of children in Africa's development and the subsequent granting of affiliate status, giving them a greater role in monitoring the realization of children rights in Africa;

Supporting the African Union reform agenda that aims to strengthen its organs and mechanisms to be more effective and productive and hoping to see an increasingly strong Committee with its protection mandate preserved;

Noting with concern that in most humanitarian situations, children are the majority, particularly now as many are facing flooding in Southern Africa, political violence in some countries on the continent, violations as a result of escalated migration, religious extremism and economic meltdown in various parts of Africa;

Therefore, we make the following observations and recommendations;

B. HUMAN DEVELOPMENT CRISIS

We note with concern that Africa is on the verge of a serious human development crisis. In little more than 30 years' time, Africa will be home to One Billion children. Yet, nearly half of all children in sub-Saharan Africa are living in extreme poverty, 30% of children in Africa are stunted. 60% of 15 to 17-year old's are out of school and those in school are not properly schooled, 3 out 5 girls in Africa get married before the age of 18 years and child pregnancies are on the rise (ACPF,2018).

It should be recognized that children have the potential to transform Africa - but if neglected they could also increase the burden of poverty and inequality, posing a serious risk to peace, security and prosperity. We therefore urge the Committee to recommend to States Parties to:

1. Harness the demographic bulge into a dividend by public investment in children starting at conception to facilitate early stimulation for children; adequate nutrition; quality social services such as health, education as well as employment opportunities for Africa's young population.

2. Commit to accelerating domestic resource mobilization; increasing allocations for child focused sectors in national and sub-regional budgets; efficient and equitable expenditure of available resources; and transparent and accountable public finance management.
3. Develop multi-sectoral policies and integrated programs that utilize a holistic and life-cycle approach to early childhood development, including enhanced monitoring of early childhood development policies and programs.

In view of the foregoing, we urge the Committee to:

- Hold a Day of General Discussion on Africa's looming human development crisis in the context of child rights;
- Work closely with the recently established African Union Continental Education Strategy for Africa's Early Childhood Education and Development (ECED) Cluster to ensure the rights of young children are represented.

C. NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS

In the context of shrinking civic space, we recognize that NHRIs are primary actors in the national human rights systems, playing a critical role in ensuring that States Parties take all the appropriate action in fulfillment of their obligations under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC).

- We therefore urge the Committee to expedite the finalization of the Guidelines for engagement of NHRIs.

D. VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN

We are concerned that this still remains as one of the biggest challenges in the realization of child rights and wellbeing in Africa. As a result, Africa is losing billions of dollars in potential earnings and human capita (World Bank, 2018). It is with dismay that we note, 1 in 4 women experienced physical violence as children, 1 in 3 experienced sexual violence, and 3 in 10 were emotionally abused, fifteen million girls get married before their 18th birthday every year in Africa. 35% of girls in Africa have undergone Female Genital

Mutilation while Child Trafficking and Sexual Exploitation of Children is on the rise (Unicef,2018).

As such, we call on the Committee to urge States Parties to put in place mechanisms to end violence against children, *inter alia*;

- Ensuring availability and accessibility of disaggregated data by age, ability and gender;
- Adopting policies and programs that facilitate the retention of pregnant girls and young mothers in schools;
- Making full use of the media to amplify children voices as well as using it as a tool for the protection of children's rights;
- Providing psychosocial and legal support for survivors of violence,
- Improving access to sexual and reproductive health rights information and services.
- Promoting the role of traditional and religious leaders in protecting the rights of children;

E. GENERAL COMMENT NO. 5

We welcome the Committee's initiative of promulgating General Comment Number 5 on Article 1 of the ACRWC. Going forward, we urge the Committee to;

- Call upon States parties to establish harmonized child helplines in Africa, by adopting the 116 as the toll-free number, making it easy for children to report violations and to get help in the shortest time possible anywhere on the continent.
- Finalize the Guidelines on child participation, thereby ensuring meaningful and deliberate engagement with children in the Committee Sessions, with at least one children Pre-Session per year.
- Encourage States Parties to consult with children in the formulation of plans, policies and laws that have a bearing on their interests. Child participation in governance must be devolved to national, regional and district levels.

- Request States Parties to specifically report on the status of coordination of different government agencies at different levels within their reporting process of the progress achieved in strengthening, child protection systems.

F. CHILDREN ON THE MOVE

We welcome the new report on children on the move that will be launched today. We urge the Committee to:

- Develop an implementation framework to address the findings of the continental mapping on children on the move.

G. MEDIA AND CHILDREN

We appreciate that the media is one of the gatekeepers of human rights. We however note with concern that media in Africa and globally depicts the African child in ways that puts the child in more harm. We recommend that the Committee:

- Issues guidelines on media and children in Africa;
- Hold a day of general discussions on media and children;
- Urge State Parties to have mechanisms to monitor the accountability of media towards children.

H. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the CSO Forum marks 10 years since its establishment in 2009. As we celebrate this milestone, we pledge our commitment and support to the Committee in the execution of its mandate.

Lastly, we would like to inform the Committee that as a follow up to the previous engagement we had at the 32nd session, there has been leadership renewal at the Forum. For the first time in the ten-year history of the Forum, we have a woman as the Chair of the Forum. This is an expression of the CSO Forum on its aspiration to be gender transformative.

We wish the Committee a successful session and look forward to collaborating with the committee on ensuring full realisation of the rights of children in Africa.