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**THE NETWORK OF AFRICAN NATIONAL HUMAN RIGHTS INSTITUTIONS  
STATEMENT AT THE 38<sup>TH</sup> ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF  
EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD**

**PRESENTED BY:**

**Mr Gilbert Sebihogo, Executive Director**

**November 2021**

**The Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child Hon. Ndayisenga Joseph;**

**Distinguished Representatives of AU Member States;**

**Honourable Members of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;**

**Distinguished Guests;**

**Ladies and Gentlemen;**

It is a privilege and an honour for me to be part of the 38<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

This invitation to address this august event is an affirmation of the confidence the Committee has on us as the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), but also the partnership and complementarity in delivering our mandate.

**Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We hold this meeting today virtually because of COVID-19. The pandemic has ravaged the globe in just two years, but it may take decades to recover from the health crisis. This is because COVID-19 metamorphosed into other pandemics, and the scars may remain with us forever. One of such pandemics is sexual and gender-based violence across the continent. This resulted from the enforcement of the movement restriction measures. Indeed, human rights mandated institutions across the continent have reported a rise in the cases of domestic violence and gender abuse, with children being prevalently affected.

As if the pandemic was not catastrophic enough, the increase in the number of armed conflicts in various parts of the continent has worsened the situation. The conflicts have also resulted in hundreds of thousands of internally displaced children, migrants, refugees, among others.

As we speak today, thousands of teenage girls across Africa have not reported to school. They are wives.

As we speak today, thousands of teenage girls across Africa have not reported to school. They are mothers.

As we speak today, thousands of teenage girls across Africa have not reported to school. They are domestic workers- caring for families.

As we speak today, thousands of teenage girls across Africa are reeling in massive pain; because of female genital mutilation.

As we speak today, thousands of teenage boys are soldiers fighting wars they know nothing about.

### **Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

In 2015, we set for ourselves Seven Aspirations, which have to be realised by 2063. How are we going to achieve these aspirations when the present and future realities of Africa's children is being and continues to be shattered? We are running out of time. Our children will not forgive us for letting them down on this promise- a promise of the *Africa We Want* where *No Child is Left Behind*.

We take note of the States and other actors' plans for recovery from the pandemic. Indeed, that is why at NANHRI, we are supporting the Committee in jointly developing and implementing the safe return to school guidelines. These guidelines are in response to the COVID pandemic but also other associated epidemics as I have earlier mentioned.

### **Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

We, in this meeting, should not stop at only ensuring the safe return to schools. We must mobilise and harness technical and financial resources from public and private actors to ensure sustainable, reactive and proactive responses. This explains why partnerships are key, as we intervene in our different roles based on our collective mandates and capacities.

While some of us may not have a direct mandate at the national level, collaboration with domestic actors becomes a pillar of mobilising, aggregating and funnelling our resources to ensure that we set up structures to accelerate recovery during and beyond the pandemic and the epidemics.

### **Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

For us to keep track of the progress we have made, we also need to set up monitoring and reporting structures. For this reason, National Human Rights Institutions are essential players at the national level.

Indeed, NANHRI and other regional bodies can amalgamate on their collective experiences, and share this, to leverage for best practice.

This brings me to the next point on NHRI **observer** and **affiliate** status. While none of the NHRIs has been granted affiliate Status- and few bodies enjoy observer status with the Committee- the increasing threat to the rights of the child demands that more NHRIs and other organisations should be granted the status. We also take note that it is only the NHRI of Cameroon that has applied for affiliate status. We are therefore mobilizing others to apply, and at the same time are working towards requesting for an expedited process.

Having Affiliate or observer statuses not only provides a formal avenue of directly engaging and contributing to the sessions and activities of the Committee, but also allows NHRIs to follow up on the implementation of the decisions of the regional body.

It is no secret that most African NHRIs and their staff have a good understanding of international instruments and mechanisms at the detriment of the same knowledge and understanding being applied in our regional bodies. This has resulted in more engagements with the international bodies than the regional mechanisms.

As NANHRI, we have identified this imbalance and have been set out to correct it. We have published guidelines and other materials, as well as targeted trainings on the regional mechanisms. The trainings and publications focus on how the NHRIs can complement the work of the regional bodies through submission of shadow and alternative reports, supporting in-country missions, among others.

Now that the 38<sup>th</sup> Ordinary Session is considering reports and issuing communications on various countries, the need for a closer working relationship between NHRIs and the Committee becomes key.

**Honourable Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,**

As I conclude, I thank the Committee for considering NANHRI as an important human rights actor.

On behalf of the African NHRIs, we commit to support the work of the Committee in delivering on its mandate.

With those remarks, I would like to conclude by wishing you a successful, productive and deliberative 38<sup>th</sup> Ordinary session.

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