

AFRICAN UNION

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UNIÃO AFRICANA

Addis Ababa, ETHIOPIA P. O. Box 3243 Telephone 517700 Fax: 517844

**EIGHTH MEETING OF THE AFRICAN
COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE
RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
27 November– 1 December 2006**

8TH MEETING OFACRWc

REPORT

DRAFT REPORT

I. INTRODUCTION

The 8th Meeting of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was held at the AU Conference Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia from 27 November to 1 December, 2006.

II. ATTENDANCE

2. The meeting was attended by 10 Members of the African Committee as well as representatives from UN Agencies, NGOs and other Organisations dealing with children issues.

III. OPENING CEREMONY

3. The official opening session was chaired by the Acting Director of the AU Department of Social Affairs.

i) Opening Remarks by the Representative of the AU Commission

4. In her opening remarks, Dr. Grace Kalimugogo, the Acting Director of the Department of Social Affairs welcomed all participants. She conveyed the apologies of Adv. Bience P. Gawanas, AU Commissioner for Social Affairs who was on mission to Abuja, Nigeria for the AU/Latin America Summit. She also apologized for the fact that the 8th Meeting of the Committee could not be convened earlier. She welcomed the new Committee Member, Mrs. Dawlut Hassan and introduced the new Head of the Social Welfare Division, Dr. Laila Gad. She also informed the Committee that a Senior Policy Officer had been recruited to assist the Committee under the AU/UNICEF project.

5. She highlighted that a number of important initiatives had been taken by the AU Commission to promote children's welfare. She referred, In particular, to the First AU Award for Children's Champion in Africa which was awarded to the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN) at the Banjul Summit in July 2006. She also mentioned the cooperation existing with partners in addressing the plight of children on the continent. This included issues of violation of children's rights; children affected by HIV/AIDS, Malaria and polio; children in conflict; and ensuring the protection and survival of children. Finally, she called on all partners to join hands in popularizing the African Charter ***on the Rights and Welfare of the Child*** and promoting the rights and welfare of the African Child.

ii) Statement by the Chairperson of the Committee

6. In his Statement, Mr. Jean-Baptiste Zoungrana, Chairperson of the African Committee, welcomed all members and partners. He expressed his gratitude to the representatives of the African Union and technical partners for their presence and commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of the child in the continent. He then recalled the recommendations made at the 7th Committee meeting, inter alia, the appointment of rapporteurs to consider the reports of States parties; the appointment of Committee Members for the elaboration of instruments and **guidelines** on communications, investigations and criteria for granting observer status with the Committee. He underscored that the Committee had also discussed the issue of strengthening the Secretariat and mobilizing resources. He apologized that the 8th Committee meeting could not take place during the first half of the year due to various reasons. He informed the meeting that in spite of the difficulties, Committee Members could undertake many missions that helped in strengthening the Committee's visibility and credibility on the continent. Committee members also carried out activities in their countries and collaborated with the AU Commission in diverse areas.

7. The Chairperson continued by recalling the important items on the agenda to be discussed at the meeting and the different drafts submitted for the Committee's consideration. He appealed to all participants to support the Committee to enable it face the challenges and promote the rights of children who represent the present and future generation of Africa. In conclusion, he renewed his gratitude to the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, the Commissioner for Social Affairs, all the Officials of the Social Affairs Department as well as to partners for their support

iii) Swearing in of a New Members of the Committee

8. Mrs. Dawlut Hassan the new Committee Member who was elected in January 2006, was called to take the oath of office by reading the oath and signing it under the guidance of the Representative of the AU Legal Counsel.

iv) Consultation among Committee Members

9. After the opening ceremony, Members of the Committee held an informal closed consultative meeting to discuss some procedural and administrative issues. It was agreed that, in order to benefit from the experience of the partners, the items on draft guidelines on communications, investigations and criteria for granting observer status should be discussed in open sessions. The Draft Programme of Work was amended accordingly.

Agenda Item 2: Procedural Matters

Adoption of the Agenda and Programme of Work

10. The Agenda and Programme of Work were adopted as amended. ***The Agenda is annexed to the Report.***

IV. PROCEEDINGS OF DELIBERATIONS

Agenda Item 3: Overview on the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and Proposals for a renewed Popularization Campaign

11. In her presentation, Dr. Philista Onyango, the Representative of the African Network for the Prevention and Protection against Child Abuse and Neglect (ANPPCAN), gave a background on how the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) was conceived and developed. She recalled that when the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) was formulated, it was felt that it did not capture the real situation existing in Africa. It was, therefore, necessary for Africa to have a Charter which would complement the UN Convention by taking into consideration the specificities prevailing in the continent. The Charter was eventually adopted in July 1990. She recalled the different Chapters in the Charter and the number of Articles under each Chapter and highlighted the difference between the ACRWC and the UNCRC. She gave the status on the signing and ratification of the African Charter and stressed the need for Member States to submit their reports to enable the Committee monitor the status of implementation of the provisions as enshrined in the Charter.

12. She then elaborated on why there should be a renewed campaign to popularize the African Charter. In this regard, she highlighted that the African Committee should learn from good practices and experiences. The Committee should be given time to carry out its mandate effectively. Furthermore, the Committee should mobilize resources; make the Charter available in all forms targeting different groups; use institutions to conduct studies on sections of the Charter; provide training and information to Ministries on the ratification and implementation of the Charter; make the Charter known and undertake missions to Member States to lobby for its ratification; establish a reporting mechanism on the violation of the rights of children; and develop a strategic plan with specific time frame on the popularization campaign of the Charter.

13. In the debate that ensued, it was highlighted that:

- a) Committee Members should popularize the Charter at the level of their Governments and make children rights known by establishing Councils/Institutions on Children's Rights;
- b) Good practices and experiences should be made available in order for other countries to benefit from them;
- c) The drafters of the African Charter should be involved in popularizing the Charter;
- d) It was important to know the number of countries which have ratified the Charter; those which have signed only and those which have neither signed nor ratified. ***Moreover, it was important for the Committee to get explanation on the reservation made by Botswana on the African Charter;***
- e) Programmes and activities should be planned before hand to make them more effective. However some activities could not be implemented because of lack of financial resources ;

- f) The Ministries dealing with children issues should be more visible;
 - g) Likewise the Committee should have the clout it deserves, in particular, within the African Union Commission.
14. In reaction to the concerns raised, it was highlighted that:
- a) Committee Members should help Governments in popularizing the rights of children;
 - b) The Committee had the power to raise concerns about children at very high levels including at Heads of State level;
 - c) Similarly, the Committee has the liberty to interact with the UN Committee, the UN Security Council , UNHCR etc.
 - d) If need be, the Committee could hire an Expert to assist in identifying strategies that would make the Committee function better;
 - e) The important documents, good experiences and the value of the Charter should be publicized and put on the AU Website. The AU should also establish a data base on children issues which could be easily accessible;
 - f) Proper advocacy programmes should be designed and priority should be given to resource mobilization;
 - g) The AU Legal Counsel office should be involved fully in the work of the Committee especially during the meetings of the Committee.

15. Finally, it was pointed out that the issues raised were both institutional and substantive. The following recommendations were then made:

- a) There was need to strengthen the Secretariat as well as the capacity of the Committee;
- b) The AU should ensure that its Website is updated with a view to giving more visibility to the Committee and providing more information on good practices, etc.
- c) There was need to prepare a briefing kit on the African Charter and the work of the Committee which would be distributed to Governments and other partners. This would make the Charter known and ensure the visibility of the Committee;
- d) Advocacy missions to critical areas should be undertaken by Committee Members. Joint missions with other partners such as UNICEF, Save the Children, Plan International, could also be envisaged.

Item 4: Brief Presentations by Partners

a) Save the Children – Sweden

16. In his presentation, the Representative of Save the Children – Sweden mentioned that Save the Children – Sweden had been supporting the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child since its inception in 2001. He highlighted that a strong Committee endowed with the right capacity and resources could bring to fruition the rights of the child as enshrined in the African

Charter and the UN CRC. He stated that Save the Children would engage with other partners to profile the work of the Committee and maintain its visibility as well as lobby for more resources for the Committee. However, the Committee should include child's participation as a key principle in its work. He also called on the Committee to start examining the state parties reports which have been received, without delay. In this regard, he requested the Committee to encourage NGOs to provide supplementary reports and offered to provide technical support in that respect. Finally, he thanked the Committee for the opportunity given to Save the Children – Sweden to make a presentation.

b) The Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa

17. In his presentation, the Representative of the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa recalled the longstanding cooperation and partnership existing between the Committee and the Institute. He underlined that, among its activities, the Institute was promoting and popularising the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In this regard, the Institute had conducted two training Workshops on the African Charter for NGOs and CSOs. However, he raised the concern that NGOs did not have observer status with the African Committee and called upon the Committee to expedite the adoption of the criteria for granting observer status to NGOs to enable more interaction between the Committee and the NGOs.

c) The African Child Policy Forum (ACPF)

18. The Representative of the African Child Policy Forum noted that the Forum had been working very closely with the Committee on a number of occasions. She recalled that the Members of the Committee were very much involved in the Second International Conference on Violence against Girls in Africa which was organised by the ACPF in May 2006. She also recalled the recommendations ***adopted*** by the Conference which called on the AU Commission to:

- strengthen the capacity of the African Committee and facilitate the participation of children;
- urgently establish a Secretariat for the Committee ;
- develop guidelines for the submission of alternative reports by Member States ;
- place violence against girls on the Agenda of the AU Summit;
- appoint a special envoy on violence against children to work with the African Committee in preventing, reporting and monitoring violence against children .

19. The Committee Members thanked the partners for their presentations and appreciated their commitment to work in partnership with the Committee in advancing the cause of children on the continent.

Item 5: Status of implementation of the recommendations of the Seventh Meeting

20. The Report on the Status of implementation of the recommendations of the Seventh Meeting was presented by the Representative of the AU Commission. She underlined that the Report highlighted the recommendations adopted by the Committee at its seventh meeting and actions undertaken by the AU Commission to implement them. She also recalled that the report was submitted to the 9th Session of the AU Executive Council held in Banjul, The Gambia in July 2006.

21. Concerns were raised about the establishment of the Secretariat for the Committee. It was recalled that the matter was discussed during the 7th meeting and that assurance was given by the AU Commission that a Secretary to the Committee would be recruited very soon. It was observed that the process was taking too long and that this was impacting negatively on the work of the Committee. The AU Commission was also requested to explain the procedure for recruitment and necessary explanation was provided to the Committee. The Committee then took note of the report.

Item 6: Consideration of the Draft Guidelines for Considering Communication received (Article 44 of the African Charter)

22. The Report on the Draft Guidelines for considering Communication received was presented by Mrs. Diakhate, the Committee Member who drafted the Report. She explained that the Draft was shared with all Committee Members and that she received comments only from the Chairperson of the Committee. She noted that the document should be examined in line with Article 44 of the African Charter **and** Article 74 of the Rules of Procedure of the Committee. She highlighted that the document was divided into three Chapters and under each Chapter a number of Articles have been developed. Chapter one dealt with the General Provisions; Chapter two with Consideration of Communications; and Chapter three with the Committee's Deliberations. She then gave specific details on the Articles under each of the three Chapters.

23. All Committee Members commended Mrs. Diakhate for a job well done. The Committee then proceeded to consider the document Chapter by Chapter and made necessary amendments on the Articles.

Item 7: Consideration of the Draft Guidelines on Investigation (Article 45 of the African Charter)

24. The Report on the Draft Guidelines on Investigation was presented by Mr. Jean-Baptiste Zoungrana, Chairperson of the Committee. He informed the Committee that the document was elaborated jointly by himself and Mrs. Polo. He explained that the document was divided as follows: an Introduction, Part A on Definition, Aim, and Types of Investigation missions; Part B on Logistics; and Part C on Follow-up of Missions. He added that several Articles were included under each part of the document. He gave a detailed brief on the content of the document.

25. After commending Mr. Zoungrana and Mrs. Polo for the document, the Committee considered the document Article by Article and made the necessary amendments.

Item 8: Consideration of the draft criteria for granting observer status to Organisations dealing with children issues

26. Mr. Sissoko, the Rapporteur of the Committee, author of the document, presented the document. He noted that, in drafting the document, he was inspired by the Criteria for Granting Observer Status adopted by the AU Commission as well as the guidelines on Observer Status prepared by the **African Commission for Human and Peoples' Rights**. He then briefed the Committee on the contents of the document and highlighted the salient Articles.

27. The document was then considered Section by Section and the necessary amendments were made.

Item 9: Briefing on the Midterm Review Meeting on the African Common Position on Children – Africa Fit for Children and consideration of the draft questionnaire to be sent to Member States

28. Dr. Laila Gad, Head of Social Welfare Division briefed the Committee on the Mid-Term Review Meeting on the African Common Position-Africa Fit for Children. She recalled that the African Common Position was developed in implementation of a mandate given to the then OAU by the Assembly of Heads of State and Government. The African Common Position was also Africa's contribution to the UN General Assembly Special Session on Children held in 2002. She noted that the Common Position addresses a number of challenges facing Africa's children and provides guidelines on actions required to solve them.

29. She explained that the **main** objective of the Mid-Term Review meeting would be to assess the implementation of the African Common Position five years after its adoption. She specified that, among others, the main issues to be dealt with during the Mid-term Review would include country reports which would be based on a questionnaire to be sent to Member States and a Child Survival Roadmap which would be developed as per the mandate of the Sirte Summit of July 2005. She added that in preparation for the Mid-Term Review Meeting, the AU Commission would finalize the questionnaire and the Child Survival Roadmap and conduct Regional Consultations. Finally, she highlighted that since Committee Members had a big role to play in the Mid-Term Review, the draft questionnaire was being presented to them for their appreciation and comments.

30. A Representative of the AU Commission then gave a brief on the questionnaire. She noted that the questionnaire was in three parts and provided the necessary explanation under each part. She explained that the indicators in

Part III of the questionnaire were not exhaustive and that Committee Members could give their inputs to improve the whole document.

31. In examining the draft questionnaire, Committee Members appreciated the work done by the AU Commission. They underlined that it was a good exercise which would provide the AU Commission and the Committee with necessary information that could also help in considering State Parties reports. However, they felt that the document could be improved by including other missing information and indicators such as those on rehabilitation, research carried out, statistics, etc.

32. After a long debate, it was agreed that the AU Commission would send electronic copies of the draft questionnaire to all Committee Members to enable them insert their inputs. However, a time-frame would be set for receipt of the inputs. It was also highlighted that all avenues would be explored to ensure that Member States respond to the questionnaire. Committee Members were also assured that the information to be provided in the questionnaire would be utilized meaningfully, for example, in drafting the State of Africa's Children Report and other documents.

Item 10: Theme for the Day of the African Child June 2007

33. In presenting the report the Representative of the African Union Commission recalled the theme for the Day of the African Child (DAC) for the past five years. She stated that the AU Commission has not made any proposal for the June 2007 Day of the African Child . The Committee should therefore come up with the most appropriate theme.

34. In the debate that ensued, it was noted that the momentum of the June 2006 theme: ***Right to Protection***: Stop Violence against Children, should be maintained and that the theme for DAC 2007 should be:**"Combat Child Trafficking"**.

Item 11: Consideration of the Revised Plan of Action (2005-2009)

35. The document was presented by the Representative of the AU Commission. She explained that, in revising the Plan of Action, activities which would be undertaken by the AU Commission had been deleted from the original Plan. Thus the estimated budget for carrying out the activities in the Plan of Action has reduced considerably making it easier for the Committee to mobilise funds from donors. She called on Committee Members to look at the document together with the original one with a view to identifying where the amendments had been made. The document was then presented objective by objective highlighting the changes made.

36. In reaction to the presentation, the following concerns were expressed:

- a) the AU Commission misunderstood the recommendations made by the 7th Meeting ***of the Committee***;

- b) there was no need to delete any activity from the original Plan of Action but rather to indicate the contribution of the AU Commission to the budget;
- c) Committee Members also needed training in some specific fields and that the activity on training of Experts should not have been deleted from the Plan;
- d) The budget should be a holistic one comprising all the activities the Committee would undertake during the five years.

37. After further debate on the matter, it was agreed that the AU Commission would rework the document and indicate clearly, by inserting a new column or otherwise, how much the AU Commission would contribute to the budget in figures and percentage.

38. The Committee then debated on strategies for mobilising resources. It was stressed that a strong resource mobilisation campaign should be undertaken at the level of donors, partners and even Heads of State. However it was pointed out that:

- a) there was need to have a holistic budget to be presented to donors with indication of the contribution of the AU Commission;
- b) some countries had resources to support the Committee but the Committee should have proper planning;
- c) the holistic budget should be submitted to Partners first. However, there was need to establish the list of partners to whom the budget would be submitted;
- d) *Each Committee Member could, with the help of the Secretariat, approach his/her Head of State for assistance. In addition, the budget should be sent to some Heads of State who could immediately be targetted, in the first instance, and followed up with visits once the way has been paved. Such Heads of State could include those of South Africa, Libya and Gabon;*
- e) *if the Committee Members were to approach Heads of State, they should be in possession of a comprehensive document on the activities to be undertaken, for the consideration of the Head of State.*
- f) *The Committee could also consider the possibility of utilizing the experience of UNICEF and UNESCO to sell greeting cards to raise funds. The procedure and modalities could be discussed with these Agencies.*

39. It was highlighted that resource mobilisation was a complex issue and should be done in a professional way. It was proposed that, in parallel to the above mentioned strategies a Consultant could be recruited to work with the AU Commission and the Committee to prepare all the necessary documentation and lay down the specific strategies.

40. It was proposed that there was need for a core group of the Committee Members to follow-up on the issue of resource mobilisation. It was recommended that the group be composed as follows:

- Mr. Jean Baptiste Zoungrana;
- Mr. Moussa Sissoko;
- Dr. Assefa Bequele

However other Committee Members could be called upon, at any time, to undertake any task related to resource mobilisation.

Item 12: Lobbying Missions to State Parties by Committee Members

41. The Representative of the AU Commission recalled that Members of the Committee had previously undertaken lobbying missions in a number of countries with the financial support of Save the Children – Sweden. She also noted that during its 5th Meeting the Committee debated and made proposals for other lobbying missions to be conducted but this did not materialise. Some Committee Members have since left and new Members have come on board. There was need, therefore, for the Committee to consider the matter and come up with proposals.

42. The Chairperson of the Committee informed the meeting that in his letter to the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs he had raised the issue of lobbying mission. In her reply, the Commissioner had assured him that an amount of US\$ 30,000.-, ***was available under the AU/UNICEF Project***, for the lobbying mission.

43. In the debate that followed, proposals were made to divide the lobbying missions into two: one to countries that have not ratified the African Charter; and the other to countries that have ratified but not submitted their country reports. ***Finally, it was decided that the mission should be to countries that have not ratified the African Charter because:***

- ***The Committee had not yet started to examine the reports received from State Parties;***
- ***The Committee did not have enough funds to widen its scope;***
- ***The Committee should focus on the activities included in its Work Plan***

44. After considering the countries that have not ratified the Charter and taking into consideration the regional balance, the following schedule was agreed upon:

- a) Tunisia: Mrs. Dawlut Hassan and Mr. Jean Baptiste Zoungrana;
- b) Sao Tome & Principe: Mrs. Diakhate and Mrs. Polo;

- c) Democratic Republic Of Congo and Gabon: Mr. Sissoko and Mrs Koffi;
- d) Liberia: Prof. Peter Ebigbo and Mrs. Koome;
- e) Zambia: Dr Assefa Bequele, Mrs Pholo and Mrs Seithamo

45. The Committee also recommended that a special mission of the Committee be sent to Darfur to report on the situation. In this regard, it was proposed that the mission be undertaken by Mr. Zoungrana, Prof. Ebigbo and Mrs. Koome

Item 13: Procedure for analyzing country reports received from State Parties

46. The Representative of the AU Commission informed the meeting that four State Parties Reports have been received from ***the following countries*** : Egypt, Mauritius, Rwanda and Nigeria and that the reports have been translated and submitted to Committee Members. She also recalled that during its last meeting the Committee had already selected the Rapporteurs to look at the Egypt and Mauritius reports.

47. The Committee then proposed the following Rapporteurs to look at the following Reports:

- Egypt : Mrs Sielthamo and Mrs. Diakhate
- Mauritius: Mrs. Pholo and Prof. Ebigbo
- Rwanda: Mr. Sissoko, Mrs Polo and Mrs. Dawlut
- Nigeria: Mrs. Koome and Mr. Assefa

48. Debating on the convening of the Pre-session, it was highlighted that there was need for the Committee to get additional report and information from the Countries and NGOs, if necessary, before convening the ***Pre-session***. It was also noted that the consideration of the reports should be done in a professional way in order to establish the credibility of the Committee. In this regard, therefore, proper preparations were required. It was recommended that the AU Commission should prepare a check list on the requirements for preparing the Pre-session, based on the Procedures for the consideration of State Party Reports which were adopted. The list which would also comprise a calendar and time-frame, would be forwarded to the Chairperson of the Committee . It was also agreed that the Pre-Session would be held soon after the next Meeting of the Committee in the first semester of 2007.

Item 14: Matters raised by Committee Members

a) Functioning of the Secretariat

49. The AU Commission Representative explained the status of the recruitment of the Secretary to the Committee as well as the other Senior Policy Officers who were to be recruited under the AU/UNICEF Project. With regard to the Secretary to the Committee, she explained that the recruitment process was taking long because the candidates who had applied for the post were not found suitable and the post had to be re-advertised. With regard to the Senior Policy Officers, she stated that one Officer was already on board and that the other person desisted the offer. She assured the Committee that the Department of Social Affairs was deploying every effort to fill the vacant posts.

50. In the debate that ensued, Committee Members appreciated the efforts being deployed by the Department of Social Affairs to recruit the Secretary to the Committee but raised the following concerns:

- a) the recruitment was taking too long and was impacting negatively on the work of the Committee;
- b) the work of the acting Secretary who had carried the work single-handedly was appreciated but the immediate need to have more staff was emphasized;
- c) The AU Commission was called upon to take immediate action to expedite the recruitment of the Secretary to the Committee.

- b) **Communication:**
 - i) **Among Committee Members**
 - ii) **Between the AU Commission and ACERWC**

51. In the discussion on communication among Committee Members, it was observed that many a time, Committee Members do not contact each other. They only meet during the Committee Meetings. It was highlighted that maintaining contacts among Committee Members was vital and a good means of exchanging information and following up on recommendations made. It was pointed out that sometimes language was a barrier for communication. It was also noted that the lack of communication was due to the fact that the Committee did not have a functional Secretariat and that the problem would be resolved once a Secretariat was established.

52. Similarly, concerns about the *insufficient* communication between the Committee and the African Union Commission were raised. Finally, it was proposed that the Secretariat should produce a monthly newsletter/bulletin to inform all Committee Members on what was happening. This newsletter/bulletin could comprise:

- A calendar of activities;
- Information on specific activities undertaken by Committee Members and a summary of the activity;
- Meetings in which Committee Members have participated and
- New appointments at the AU Commission

c) Meetings of the Committee

53. In consideration of the above item, Committee Members deplored the fact that no meeting was held during the ***first semester*** of 2006. The Chairperson briefed the Committee on his meeting with the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs on 10 May 2006 during which the convening of the 8th Meeting of the ACERWC was discussed and explained the reason why the meeting had to be postponed.

54. In the debate that followed, the consensus was that the Committee should meet at least twice a year in conformity with its Rules of Procedure. It was also proposed that it would be advisable to hold Committee meetings in different regions and countries to make the Committee known and more visible.

55. It was finally, recommended that:

- a) the dates of the Committee meetings be fixed;
- b) preparations for the meeting start in good time;
- c) Committee Members be informed of the dates well ahead of time to enable them make the necessary arrangements;
- d) Travel arrangements for Committee Members be done early and PTAs sent to them in good time.

e) Actions to be undertaken related to Violence against Children

56. Dr. Assefa Bequele briefed the ***Committee on the serious problem of violence against children in the world at large and in Africa, in particular and*** on efforts ***being deployed at*** international level ***to address*** the issue of Violence against Children. He recalled that an ***Independent*** Expert was appointed ***by the UN Secretary General*** to carry out a Study on Violence ***against Children***. In this regard, studies were carried out, regional consultations were conducted and a report was submitted to the UN General Assembly. He highlighted that ***among the most important initiatives carried out in this regard was the organisation by*** the African Child Policy Forum of ***an*** International Conference on Violence against Girls ***in Africa***. The outcome of the Conference was the adoption of a Pledge and an Africa Declaration on Violence against Girls. Among others, the Declaration called on the African Union Commission to include the issue of Violence against Children in the Agenda of the AU Summit and appoint a Special Envoy on Violence against Children.

57. In the debate that followed, Committee Members commended ***The African Child Policy Forum*** for convening the Conference on violence against girls. It was noted that the issue of violence against children was ***a pervasive and serious problem*** on the continent and that necessary measures should be taken to address the problem.

58. Finally, Committee Members ***felt that the Committee and the AU Commission needed to follow-up on the 2006 Day of the African Child***

whose theme was “Right to Protection: Stop Violence against Children” and recommended that the AU Commission should:

- a) include Violence against Children in the Agenda of the AU Summit;
- b) appoint a Special Envoy on Violence against Children.

Item 15: Any Other Business

a) Second AU Award on Children’s Champions in Africa

59. The Representative of the AU Commission gave a brief on the First AU Award on Children’s Champions in Africa. ***She informed the Committee that ANPPCAN who was the winner received the Award*** in Banjul during the AU Summit held in July 2006. She recalled the process undertaken by the AU Commission in preparation for the Award. She also indicated that three Committee Members participated in the meeting of the Panel of Judges. She explained that after Banjul nothing much has been done on the Award. The Committee put in place for the Award had not met and there was ***no*** indication ***yet*** when the next Award would be ***organised***. She also added that it was not sure that the second AU Award would be on children.

60. The Chairperson confirmed that the Committee was involved in the preparation of the Award and that he was also in Banjul. However, he could not be at the Award Ceremony because of protocol and security arrangements by the Gambian authorities.

b) Participation Rights of Children

61. In introducing the subject, Prof. Peter Ebigbo noted that children were becoming more and more aware of their rights through various means including children’s parliament. There was, therefore, a dire need to include them in all activities concerning them. He added that participation of children would ensure their education, protection and their best interest. He proposed that studies on ***child participation*** be conducted and the findings put on the AU Website.

62. Committee Members appreciated the initiative of Prof. Ebigbo to include the important item of child participation on the Agenda. It was highlighted that children were not allowed to participate in any activity because of other problems such as lack of good governance and democratic culture. It was also noted that, in the African context, children were not allowed even to participate in decisions made within the family.

63. Finally, it was proposed that:

- a) Child participation should be put on the Agenda of the next meeting of the Committee;
- b) Child participation could be adopted as the theme for the Day of the African Child in the future;
- c) the African Child Policy Forum was willing to carry out studies on child participation in collaboration with other partners;

c) Brief on Meetings

64. The Chairperson of the Committee briefed the Committee on the various meetings he attended in June/July 2006. These included:

- The Training of Journalists organised by the International Institute on the Rights of Children in Dakar, Senegal, from 26 to 20 June, 2006 ;
- The 9th AU Executive Council in Banjul, the Gambia, from 26 to 27 June, 2006;
- The Meeting of the First Session of the African Court on Human and Peoples Rights, in Banjul, the Gambia, from 3 to 5 July, 2006.

65. He stated that in all these meetings he was called upon to make presentations on the rights and welfare of the child and on the activities of the Committee. He gave an in-depth detail on how the meetings were conducted, his participation and the outcome. Finally, he highlighted the logistical and organisational problems encountered during these missions. He called on the AU Commission to give more visibility to the Committee and to the Chairperson of the Committee. He proposed that the Chairperson of the Committee should enjoy the same treatment as the Chairperson of the Commission on Human and People's Rights. This would include ensuring proper protocol and transport.

d) Appreciation

66. The Rapporteur of the Committee informed the meeting that, in consultation with his other colleagues, it has been agreed that a special appreciation be noted for the services rendered by Mrs. S. Rahim to the Committee. He explained that since the establishment of the Committee, Mrs. S. Rahim has been working with the Committee as Acting Secretary to the Committee and that many activites which have been carried out by the Committee would not have been possible without Mrs Rahim's assistance and support. He added that Mrs. Rahim was the institutional memory of the Committee and that she should continue to assist the Committee **and be with** the new Secretary to the Committee, when appointed.

67. Committee Members reiterated their appreciation and it was proposed that:

- a) this sentiment be raised with the AU Chairperson when the Committee meets with him;
- b) a letter be written by the Committee Chairperson to the AU Commissioner for Social Affairs expressing the Committee's gratitude and appreciation to Mrs. S. Rahim.

68. Finally, Mrs. S. Rahim, thanked all Committee Members for their kind words and appreciation and assured them of her continued support.

Item 16: Adoption of the Draft Report

69. *The draft Report as well as the draft guidelines on communications, investigation and granting of observer status were adopted as amended. It was pointed out that the three documents on the guidelines should be forwarded to the AU Legal Counsel's office to improve on the language and terminology.*

Item 17: Closing

70. *In her closing statement, the Head of Social Welfare Division, Dr. Laila Gad congratulated Committee Members for a job well done. She thanked Committee Members as well as partners for their active participation in the meeting. She recalled that the Committee had been able to adopt a number of substantive documents which would enable it carry out its mandate effectively as well as advocate for the well-being of children in the continent. She concluded by thanking Committee Members, partners, the staff of the Department of Social Affairs as well as all technical staff for their cooperation and for ensuring the success of the meeting.*

71. *The Chairperson of the Committee, Mr. Jean-Baptiste Zoungrana, expressed his satisfaction about the conclusions of the meeting. He recalled that the Committee was the operational organ to ensure the implementation of the provisions of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. He noted that, since its establishment, the Committee has managed to adopt a number of working instruments to enable it function effectively.*

72. *He then gave a brief on what transpired during the 8th Meeting which, among others, included: the adoption of the guidelines on communication, investigation and granting of observer status to relevant NGOs and Organisations; the adoption of the revised Work Plan; the adoption of the theme for the 2007 Day of the African Child; the consideration of the questionnaire to be sent to Member States for the Mid-Term Review Meeting on the African Common position – Africa Fit for Children; the nomination of Rapporteurs to consider reports received from State Parties; the identification of countries and nomination of Committee Members to undertake lobbying missions; and the need to include Violence against Children on the AU Summit Agenda.*

73. *Finally, the Chairperson thanked all Committee Members for their invaluable contributions. He also thanked all partners and called on them to continue to support the activities of the Committee. He expressed his appreciation to the AU Commission for its cooperation and support and thanked the Interpreters and all technical staff. He wished everybody a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year and wished Committee Members a safe journey back home. He then declared the meeting closed.*