

AFRICAN UNION

**African Committee of Experts on the
Rights and Welfare of the Child**



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**Comité Africain d'Experts sur les Droits et
le Bien-être de l'Enfant**

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*"An Africa Fit for
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**REPORT OF THE EXPERIENCE SHARING FORUM ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF
THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD HELD
IN MAURITIUS ON 27-28TH SEPTEMBER 2017**

Insert group photo

October 2017

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1. Introduction

The Experience Sharing Forum on the Implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was organized by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) in Mauritius on 27-29 September 2017.

2. Attendance

The Forum was attended by three members of the ACERWC, Representatives of Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, The Gambia, Mauritania, Mauritius, Niger, Tanzania, Tunisia, Seychelles, South Africa, South Sudan, Sudan, Somalia, Swaziland, as well as representatives of the Regional Economic Communities (East African Community) and Network of African National Human Rights Institutions. Partners such as Plan International, International Committee of the Red Cross, African Child Policy Forum, World Vision International, Save the Children, Equality Now, AfriChild, ECPAT International and Graca Machel Trust participated in the Forum.

3. Opening ceremony

3.1. Opening speech by the representative of the ACERWC

The Forum was graced with the opening remarks of Mr Joseph NDAYISENGA, 2nd Chairperson of the ACERWC. He started his speech by expressing gratitude for the Government of Mauritius for its willingness to host the Forum. Mr NDAYISENGA highlighted that the African Children's Charter is the only regional instrument devoted for children. Despite this, he underlined that there is a significant gap in the ratification of, reporting on, and implementation of the Charter. Mr NDAYISENGA alluded to the fact that Forums like these give insights for States about the possible measures they can take to foster child protection. He also mentioned that the Forum aims at inspiring States to ratify report on, and implement the Charter. Mr NDAYISENGA further reported that the ACERWC developed Agenda 2040 which has been adopted by the Executive Council of the African Union and called upon States to consider this Agenda (2040) in the implementation of children's rights in their respective countries. Moreover, he mentioned that the ACERWC will launch its Continental Study on the Impact of Conflict and Crisis on Children in Africa during the Forum. Mr NDAYISENGA finally stressed that the welfare of children is in our hands and that investing in children today is investing in Africa's tomorrow.

3.2. Opening speech by the Minister of Gender Equality, Child Development, and Family Welfare

The speech of the Minister was delivered by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Mrs J. Jaunbocus. She thanked the ACERWC for organizing the Forum in Mauritius. It was highlighted that the African Children's Charter and the ACERWC are significant to address the disadvantaged situation of children of Africa. In her Speech, Mrs J. Jaunbocus highlighted some of the achievements of the Government of Mauritius such as the provision of universal basic services, allocation of budget to execute child related programs, establishment of legal frameworks for the participation of the private sector in national efforts to protect children's rights, establishment of back to home and foster care programs to deinstitutionalize children, development of Child Protection Regulations as well as Child Mentoring Program. It was also indicated that the Ministry of Gender Equality, Child Development, and Family Welfare has established a fast-track system for birth registration, a system to monitor Child Day Care Centers, and facilitates the commemoration of the Day of the African Child. Moreover, it was highlighted that the Ministry is developing a children's bill.

The speech highlighted that the ratification of the Charter illustrates the commitment of the ratifying State to improve the situation of children and that reporting is imperative to monitor the implementation of the Charter and create dialogue about child rights. It was stressed that States should ratify, report on but also domesticate the Charter as well as other relevant treaties to promote children's rights. The speech was concluded by calling up on participants to become ambassadors of child rights in their respective countries.

4. Expectation sharing session

Participants were taken through a round of introductions during which they also shared their expectations of the Forum. The main expectations raised include: to get firm commitments from countries on ratification, reporting, and implementation of the Charter; to acquire knowledge about the charter and its implementation; to share experience on the implementation of the Charter and learn from others on how they are addressing challenges; to learn how supporting institutions (human rights institutions, civil society and international agencies) can engage states in the ratification and reporting; to learn from countries that have reported on how to submit a report including how resource are mobilized and how data is collected; to identify the reasons for the low ratification of and reporting on the Charter and identify measures to be taken to address this problem.

5. Overview of the objectives and program of the Forum

Mr John Njoka, Facilitator of the Forum, introduced the objectives of the Forum and the program of work. He highlighted that the main objectives of the Forum are to;

- accelerate the process of ratification and reporting;
- encourage the withdrawal of reservations;
- solicit the implementation of the Charter and the recommendations of the Committee
- raise awareness on the Guidelines on State Party Reporting;
- Identify good practices and challenges in the above issues; and
- encourage CSOs engagement on reporting and implementation of the African Children's Charter.

The Facilitator also presented the program of work for the participants and emphasized that all expectations will be met during the Forum.

6. Introduction to the African Children's Charter

This session focused on a theoretical exposure on the African human rights system with focus on the African Children's Charter as well as why countries ratify and also make reservations. Two presentations were made by the ACERWC Secretariat officers.

Presentation on the African human rights system with a focus of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and its monitoring body

Mr. Ayalew Getachew, from the Secretariat of the ACERWC made a presentation to introduce the African human rights system and give a brief background of the Charter as well as the works of the ACERWC. Mr. Ayalew made reference to the fact that human rights protection can be provided at national level, regional level and global level. He highlighted that the need for establishing a regional system beyond the national and global system arises from the specificity and context based response it offers. In addition, it was underlined that such regional systems offer faster response due to political and economic ties; higher possibilities of reaching agreements; and sense of belongingness.

Mr. Ayalew indicated that the African human rights system is composed of normative frameworks and institutions. The normative frameworks include: The African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights on the Rights of Women, the Organization of the African Union Convention governing the specific aspects of the problems of refugees in Africa, the African Charter on Democracy, Elections, and Governance, and Convention Governing the Specific Aspects of Refugee

Problems in Africa, the African Union Convention on the Protection and Assistance of Internally Displaced Persons in Africa, the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights Establishing the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights. He further stated that the institutions include The African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Court on Human and Peoples' Rights, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC).

Mr. Ayalew explained that the need to adopt a regional child rights instrument was inspired by political and legal reasons. The political reason is the exclusion of African countries during the negotiations of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) and the legal reason is that UNCRC does not contain provisions that address the specific issues of Africa such as the situation of children in apartheid, the specific disadvantages of the girl child, harmful practices prevalent in Africa, definition of the child, the role of extended families, and the minimum age of recruitment to the military. It was mentioned that the African Children's Charter is ratified by 48 states with 7 States remaining namely, Democratic Republic of Congo, Morocco, Sao Tome and Principe, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Somalia, South Sudan, and Tunisia.

During his presentation, Mr. Ayalew highlighted that the Charter has four cardinal principles which guide the implementation of all the 31 substantive provisions of the Charter. The principles are Non-discrimination; Best interests of the child; The life, survival and development of the child; and Participation of the child. Mr. Ayalew informed the Forum that the ACERWC is the monitoring body of the Children's Charter established in 2001 pursuant to article 32 of the Charter. The Committee has 11 elected members. He underscored that in accordance with article 42 of the Charter, the ACERWC has the mandate to promote and protect the rights of children, to monitor the implementation of the provisions of the Charter, to interpret the provisions of the Charter, and to collect and document information. Finally, Mr. Ayalew mentioned that the functions of the ACERWC include consideration of State Party reports, consideration of complaints, adopting general comments, undertaking investigative missions as well as conducting research and studies.

Presentation and discussion on the rationale and practicalities of ratification of and reservations made on the African Children's Charter

Mr Sekone Wendyam Philippe from the Secretariat of the ACERWC made a presentation on the justification and practical aspects of the ratification process and reservations made on the provisions of the Charter.

After giving an update on the actual ratification status by 48 AUMS, Mr Sekone presented that the main reason why to ratify the Charter. This can be used at last resort in case of violation in order to protect children's rights. To ratify the Charter, there is a

procedure to follow with different steps: the official ratification by the parliament or the executive; the originals have to be submitted to the AU Legal Department, the Charter shall enter into force for the Country who had ratified within 30 days and only after that, the AUMS will be considered as a State Party. Then in order to make the Charter effective the State Party, according to his treaty law can make it immediately applicable or will have to domesticate his legislation in order to include the Charter. The ideal will be to make studies of compatibility and relevance before ratifying any International Convention.

During his presentation, Mr Sekone also explained the option for a State Party to make reservations on any provision of the Charter, but also mitigate this possibility by explaining that the ACERWC might interpret the Charter differently. As a matter of fact, the following States Parties have made reservations to the Charter: Botswana, Egypt, Mauritania and Sudan. Mr Sekone gave us the example of the Government of Egypt when the ACERWC received two communications as per his mandate mentioned in article 44 of the Charter. As this State Party made a reservation on the mandate of the ACERWC to receive communication; the question here was to know whether the reservation introduced by the Government of the Arab Republic of Egypt is compatible with the object and purpose of the Charter itself. In order to reply, Mr Sekone highlighted the principle mentioned in article 19 (c) of the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties 1969 which provides that reservations incompatible with the object and purpose of a treaty are invalid. A reservation that rejects the competence of the ACERWC to receive and consider communications would then be contrary to the object and purpose of the Charter. For this reason, the Committee considered that Egypt's reservation to article 44 is incompatible with the object and purpose of the Charter which is in "all actions" to advocate and protect "the best interests of the child" must be "the primary consideration" (Article 4 of the Charter).

Finally, Mr Sekone indicated the objectives of submitting reports to the ACERWC; not only once but as a continuing commitment on the realization of children's rights issues. He gave the example of Tunisia and Mauritius who are doing very well in matters of education. Mr Sekone presented the challenges for the submission of reports as some countries have not submitted any reports, or for others there are irregular reports or combined reports and some reports are not aligned with the reporting guidelines.

Discussions

Following the two presentations, participants raised questions on whether or not the ACERWC gives approval on reservations, what assistance is available in relation to reporting to ACERWC, whether or not there are mechanisms in which the ACERWC engages with the other African human rights organs as well as the UNCRC. Moreover, participants raised questions in relation to the formal procedure of ratification, when a

country is considered State Party to the Charter, and when an initial report should be submitted after ratification. Questions were also raised with regards to the kinds of challenges the ACERWC faces concerning reporting of States and the standards of the ACERWC on State Party reports including collection of data and statistics.

In response to the questions raised, the Secretariat of the ACERWC first indicated that a country is considered to be a State Party once it deposits its ratification instrument in the African Union Commission (AUC). Upon ratification, a State Party is obliged to submit its initial report to the Committee in two years and every three years afterwards. The Secretariat informed the Forum that the Committee has allowed the submission of combined reports and also for States to use the report they submitted to UNCRC by contextualizing it to the Charter.

Concerning challenges, it was underlined that lack of deposition of the ratification documents in the AUC and lack of reporting to the Committee while submitting reports to the UNCRC are challenges the Committee is facing. Regarding the issue of the support available to States, the Secretariat highlighted that as a matter of priority States should allocate budget to the process of reporting to the Committee, but that supports is also available from UNICEF and other organizations. It was also emphasized that the Committee engages with other human rights organs to enhance ratification and report including the African Governance Architecture Platform to which all human rights organs are a member. The Committee also has a joint task force with the UNCRC. It was finally mentioned by the Secretariat that, reservations remain until a country withdraws its reservations despite the Committee pronouncing that certain reservations are against the objective and purpose of the Charter.

7. Relevance of State Party reporting

This session was conducted through group discussions (two Anglophone and two Francophone). The Facilitator raised the following questions to guide the group discussions:

- Why do countries report and others don't?
- Why do countries make reservations?
- How does a state party benefit from reporting? Why should we invest in reporting? What are the introspection aspects in your country?
- How does State Party report help in the protection and promotion of children's rights?

Following the group discussions, each group presented their findings on the discussions.

In relation to why State Parties do not comply with their reporting obligations, it was presented that limited technical and financial resource, lack of political will, unavailability of a focal person to steer the reporting process, as well as having backlog of treaty reports are some of the reasons for non-reporting. Furthermore, the group presentations highlighted that the reason to enter into reservations could be inability to harmonize the Charter with domestic laws which is caused by lack of human and technical resources to undertake the harmonization process. Other reasons for reservations mentioned during the presentations include conflict between national and international law and lack of knowledge on the interpretation of the Charter.

In response to the issue of the benefit of reporting to the ACERWC, the group presentations highlighted that reporting on the implementation of the Charter offers self-assessment and self-monitoring mechanism to States, enhances accountability of States to their people, and allows States to identify challenges and develop measures to tackle them. In addition, it was underlined that the concluding observations and recommendations by the ACERWC assist to improve implementation of the Charter and brings an opportunity to learn from best practices. Moreover, it was underscored that the constructive dialogue between the ACERWC and the technical people from the Government assists State Parties to devise solutions to the challenges that affect children directly and indirectly and also helps in developing policy on issues relating to children. The reporting also has political and economic advantages as it helps to project good image of the Countries.

Concerning the involvement of stakeholders in the State Party reporting procedure, the reflections of the groups was that it assists States to prioritize their needs as per the report and also get help to improve the situation of children on the ground. Stakeholders might be able to assist States on the technical and financial resources which are lacking to fully implement the Charter. Stakeholders such as the Civil Society Organizations are wide spread on the ground and hence able to provide the much needed information on the situation of children in the Countries. Additionally, it was highlighted that the involvement of other stakeholders gives a sense of ownership to the process and helps to develop an impartial report.

Finally, **in addressing the issue of how reporting enhances the promotion of child rights**, the group presentations mentioned that the feedback given by the ACERWC on the report helps State Parties to protect the rights of children and helps create awareness to the general population. It also serves as an advocacy tool in the protection of children as well as creating synergies, identifying what is missing, and determining what can be done to improve the status of children in the Country. It was further indicated that the State Party reporting mechanism echoes the fact that the protection of children is not the monopoly of a single Ministry in any Country.

After the presentations, the participants wanted to know why there should be two reports (State Party and Complementary (CSO) reports) instead of one report per State Party to the Committee. They were informed that the CSO report was a check and balance on what the State Party reported on the status of children in the Country. Some participants were of the view that there was need for a third report by National Human Rights Institutions to be included in the reporting on the implementation of the Charter by the State Party and CSO reports. Further to this, the Forum was informed that after the Committee receives the State Party report, it awaits the CSOs to send their Complementary report which they consider and come up with a list of issues for the State Party to clarify prior to consideration of the State Party report. However, in instances where the CSO report is not forthcoming, the Committee goes ahead to consider the State Party report.

On the issue of reservations, the understanding was that amending the Constitution was a long and difficult process but it was possible with the political will of the Countries. A case in point was the amendment of the definition of the child in Malawi from 16 to 18 years where the State complied with the requirements of the amicable settlement by adopting a bill which amends the Constitution of Malawi. The amendment was done in less than 3 months after the Government appeared before the Committee in November 2016. The participants also wanted to know the relation between the African Union Commission (AUC) and the Member States. In response to this, it was indicated that the AUC is the Secretariat of the African Union hence serves Africa.

8. Guidelines on State Party reporting to the ACERWC

Mrs Goitseone Nanikie Nkwe, member of the ACERWC, presented about the Guidelines of the ACERWC on State Party Reporting. Mrs. Nkwe started her presentation by indicating that ratification of and reporting on the Charter is a reaffirmation and confirmation of States' commitment to protect children's rights. She highlighted that reporting brings various relevant opportunities to State Parties, among others, to evaluate how far States have gone in domesticating the charter; to assess how far they have aligned their laws & policies to the Charter, to examine measures taken to respect, protect & fulfil children's rights, to challenges in the implementation of the Charter, and to get insights and recommendations from the ACERWC on measures to reinforce implementation of the Charter.

Mrs. Nkwe introduced that the State Party reporting mechanism is organized along 9 clusters namely general measures of implementation, definition of the child, general principles, civil rights and freedoms, family environment and alternative care, health and welfare, education and leisure, special protection measures, and responsibilities of the child. Mrs. Nkwe explained the information that should be provided in each cluster while preparing and compiling state party reports.

She emphasized that the detailed explanations of the clusters are found in the ACERWC's Guidelines on Initial and Periodic Reports as well as the Forum Guide. These guidelines are available on the ACERWC's website (www.acerwc.org)

After the presentation, participants raised the issue on the limit on the number of words for a consolidated report (initial & periodic report) on the implementation of the Charter. The forum was informed that what needs to be reported on, is what the particular Country has achieved since the ratification of the Charter. This includes disaggregated data on age, gender, special groups etc. This shows how children in a particular State Party are being catered for. It was highlighted that a State Party report should emphasize on the content not the length. On issues of whether there are sanctions on State Parties that do not report, the participants were informed that the Committee does not have any mandate to do so.

However, the Committee has been assisting Member States to ratify and report through lobbying and also building their capacity to understand the Charter and this Forum was one of the efforts to achieve full ratification and reporting. The Committee in 2013 requested UNICEF to approach State Parties who had not reported and assist them to undertake the process and in the subsequent years following the intervention of UNICEF, the Committee received 10 State Party reports. It was underlined that currently 36 State Parties have reported while 12 of those who have ratified have never reported. However, the Committee informed the Forum that there are guidelines on how to prepare and compile State Party reports, and up to date, the Committee has only rejected one report that did not adhere to the guidelines.

9. Process of the preparation and compilation of State Party reports

This session started with group discussions on the process of preparation and compilation of State Party reports. The groups were organized around language with Anglophone and Francophone countries/speakers sitting separately in two groups each. The Facilitator provided the following questions to the participants to guide the group discussions:

- Is there a responsible organ to prepare State Party reports in your respective countries?
- Is there sufficient and necessary budget allocated to the process of the preparation of State Party reports?
- How do you gather information and data for the report?
- Do you undertake consultations with children, CSOs and other stakeholders?
- Is there a deliberate coordination among various organs?

It was indicated that groups should identify good practices and challenges in relation to the above issues raised.

Following the group discussions, representatives from each group made brief presentations on their findings. It came out that there are responsible coordination mechanisms/councils or offices such as ministries of foreign affairs or social development or women or justice or in the office of the Prime Minister in many countries. Burkina Faso, South Africa, and Tanzania are examples with specific coordination mechanisms. It was observed that in many countries there are drafting teams who will prepare the report and submit to the responsible ministry for stakeholder engagement and input. In some other countries like South Africa and Sudan, it was mentioned that there are treaty body reporting organs tasked with the preparation of State Party reports.

In terms of budget allocation, the presentations informed that States allocate some sort of budget to the reporting process but the budget is not sufficient. Hence, most of the budget to the process comes from donors such as UNICEF. However, it was mentioned that in some countries like South Africa, the government fully funds the preparation of the reports.

The group presentations revealed that information is gathered through consultations with various sectoral ministries and departments. However, there are challenges in getting nationally representative data. Countries like the Gambia with no children's or social ministries use civil society for data gathering. It was informed that often there is reliance on individual consultants or focal points/individuals within ministries, which threatens sustainability and has budget implication. The presentations highlighted that consultations are undertaken with civil society including children's and youth organizations, e.g. children's parliaments. However, it was mentioned that most of the consultation is adult-driven with children with disabilities and other marginalized ones largely left out. Furthermore, it was alluded that there is a challenge in identifying and reaching consensus on the objectives of consultations among children and various stakeholders.

While pointing out that coordination among the various ministries is paramount, it was indicated that most ministries do not understand their role in relation to children's rights which makes coordination difficult. Moreover, it was highlighted that there is no clear understanding among ministries on which ministry is responsible to organize the coordination as it raises an authority issue. The groups recommended that MOU should exist among the various ministries to clear the abovementioned issues regarding coordination.

The presentations identified various challenges in the preparation of State Party reports. In most countries, there are challenges of capacity, budget and weak collaboration among the various sectoral actors. Many countries rely on UNICEF for most of their reporting needs both budget-wise and for capacity building. Countries such as Nigeria where there is federalism experience delays in terms of getting nation-wide consensus since each state must domesticate a treaty and agree on the report. In addition, it was highlighted that there is a challenge to obtain information from various ministries as child rights issues are not mainstreamed in their plans and works. Lack of political will to establish an organ which develops reports, work load, lack of up-to-date data, and socio-economic crisis were also flagged as challenges during the presentations.

The main good practice and recommendation was for the ministries directly dealing with child rights issues to lead the report preparation otherwise the process could be legalistic. South Africa's experience was significant as it has an institutionalized body and a standing coordination committee with a dedicated budget. Sudan also has a treaty reporting council and budget. It was stressed that South Africa's experience should be taken as a lesson by other States since institutionalized State Party reporting makes the preparation of State Party reports a day-to-day routine works as opposed to an event.

Burkina Faso shared its experience pointing out that timely reporting has been due to having an Inter-ministerial Committee on Human Rights with 14 organs which is well funded and supported by the Cabinet. Each organ gets funded as per need.

10. Implementation of the recommendations of ACERWC

This session was conducted through a panel discussion. There were presentations from four (4) panelists followed by discussion. The presentations focused on the following:

a. Translation and dissemination of the concluding observations and recommendations of ACERWC: Government of Cameroon

Mr Stephane Christel Noah, Representative of Cameroon shared the experience of Cameroon on the dissemination of the recommendations of the ACERWC. He stated that once the recommendations are received, they are sent to all ministries especially ministries of women's empowerment and social affairs as well as the office of the Prime Minister, which has an organ for monitoring the implementation of concluding observations and recommendations. He indicated that the Ministry of Social Affairs also shares the recommendations with the civil society, community leaders and other stakeholders. Following the dissemination, Mr Noah underlined that the Ministry of Social Affairs develops a road map on the implementation of the recommendations. The road map assesses the roles of different ministries and other actors as well as timelines.

It was informed that the road map is shared with children's parliament, the Inter-Ministerial Committee and Ministry of Finance for their consideration.

Mr Noah mentioned that translation of the concluding observations and recommendations is a challenge as there are 363 local languages in Cameroon. Ministry of Social Affairs works in conjunction with the association in charge of child rights as well as media to popularize and disseminate the recommendations.

b. Role of civil society in implementation of concluding observations and recommendations: Eastern Africa Child Rights Network (EACRN)

The presentation on the role of EACRN was made by Mr Maximilien Ruzigana, Chairperson of the Management Committee of EACRN. Mr Ruzigana introduced that membership of the EACRN comprises of CSOs from Burundi, South Sudan, Sudan, Tanzania, Kenya, Uganda and Ethiopia. He highlighted that members of the EACRN participate in the preparation of complementary reports both at the UNCRC and ACERWC levels. For instance the Burundi Child Rights Coalition is in the process of reporting to the UNCRC, while the Coalition of Rwanda has reported to the ACERWC. It was also indicated that the Sudan Child Rights Coalition has worked on the CSO reports for the UNCRC and the ACERWC. The EACRN assists in the preparation of the CSO reports which requires data collection, consultation and validation. It was mentioned that the EACRN also analyses the reports and in consultations with the national coalitions and try to pick the hot issues in the region. It further encourages states to report and to implement the recommendations of the ACERWC.

c. Role of civil society in implementation of concluding observations and recommendations: Child Rights Network of Southern Africa (CRNSA)

Mr Desmond Nyuma Mhango, Chairperson of the CRNSA briefly informed participants about the role of CRNSA. He started by mentioning that CRNSA was established in 2012 with the role of cross coordination among the various CSOs in Southern Africa. Mr Mhango indicated that CRNSA facilitates the participation of CSOs in the State Party reporting procedure. It was highlighted that CSOs who are members of the national coalitions speak to state parties to comply with their reporting obligations and support in the preparation of the reports. In addition, Mr Mhango underlined that child rights barometer assessment is developed by CRNSA to solicit the domestication of the charter and the implementation of concluding observations and recommendations of the ACERWC.

d. Implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations of the ACERWC: Government of Tanzania

Mr Mathias Haule, representative of the Government of Tanzania shared the experience of Tanzania in the consideration of the concluding observations of the ACERWC in developing laws and policies. He informed that Tanzania has undertaken initiatives to translate the concluding observations and to prepare an action plan on its implementation. It was indicated that the action plan and translated concluding observations will be widely disseminated. Towards the implementation of the concluding observations, Mr Haule underscored that the Government of Tanzania has undertaken analysis of gaps in laws that perpetuate violation of children's rights, build the capacity of Legal Sector Institutions, orienting and developing guidelines on reporting mechanisms for various officials, and support interventions which aim at providing series for children and women.

The presentation also highlighted some of the challenges in the implementation of the concluding observations including insufficient resource allocation for child development issues, other competitive priorities of the government, as well as deep-rooted socio-cultural practices such as child marriage, FGM, and corporal punishment. Finally Mr Haule stressed that active collaboration of the Government of Tanzania with CSOs and other international agencies is a key factor which helped the State Party to implement the concluding observations of the ACERWC.

e. Discussions

Following the panel presentations, participants were given the chance to make interventions. There was an experience shared by the representative of Mauritania pointing out that there is a technical multi-sectorial committee that implements concluding observations and drafts plan of action on the implementation for all treaty bodies. And the plan of action will be distributed among various ministries and departments.

The representative of Gambia highlighted that it would be good to know why Tanzania is struggling with child marriage as a challenge yet it has child marriage laws. In response, it was mentioned that socio-cultural practices take long to change and go beyond legal implementation to also broader attitudinal and behavior change.

Finally, a participant from Save the Children wanted to know about the process of the preparation of alternative reports. The participant was referred to the guidelines on CSO reporting.

11. Role of supporting institutions

This session was also facilitated through a panel of the Network of African Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI), Regional Economic Communities (RECs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Forum.

a. Network of African National Human Rights Institutions (NANHRI)

Mrs. Noris MANGULAMA represented NANHRI in this presentation. She introduced that NANHRI is a membership organization for national human rights institutions (NHRIs). She further introduced that NHRIs are bodies established by government to do advocacy, advise governments, receive complaints on human rights violations as well as monitor human rights implementation processes. They are established according to the Paris Principles emphasizing independence and autonomy even if funded by governments.

Ms MANGULAMA underlined that according to the UN General Assembly Resolution on National Institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, NHRIs have the mandate to submit opinions, recommendations, proposals and reports on any matters concerning the promotion and protection of human rights; to promote and ensure the harmonization of national legislation regulations and practices with the international human rights instruments; to encourage ratification or accession of the human rights instruments and ensure their implementation; and to contribute to the State party reports. Accordingly, in relation to the African Children's Charter and its monitoring body, she highlighted that NHRIs can play role to promote ratification and harmonisation of national legislation and children's charter; monitor compliance with the provisions of the ACERWC; and contribute to the submission of state party, complimentary or shadow reports. In addition, it was underscored that NHRIs can collaborate with the ACERWC through assisting in the formulation of programmes and research on child rights (data and information generation and dissemination); commenting publicly on any specific situation of child rights violation; and investigating child related complaints and rights violations.

However, Ms MANGULAMA pointed out that there is no legal framework in which NHRIs can engage with the ACERWC and indicated that NANHRI requests the ACERWC to take advantage of the mandate of NHRIs and establish a mechanism in which NHRIs can submit a separate report on the African Children's Charter.

b. Regional Economic Communities (RECs)

The only REC present during the Forum was the East African Community (EAC). The presentation was made by Mr Morris Tayebwa from the EAC Secretariat. The presentation informed that the EAC Secretariat does a lot of engagement with Partner States. Mr Tayebwa indicated that EAC is structured in Partner States through ministries.

The direct role of EAC is collaboration at national level in terms of implementation, reporting and policy guidance. In reporting, EAC seeks at harmonized reporting, which has not been done so far. Mr Tayebwa explained that by harmonized reporting EAC

looks forward for countries in the same region to report to treaty bodies in the same time. It was highlighted that EAC can play a role is to monitor, follow-up and implement the recommendations. The mechanism encourages states to report and implement on time by creating experience sharing forums. Such forums put incentive for commitment and political will.

It was further highlighted that the EAC secretariat is supported by an inter-agency group comprising international NGOs. Through this arrangement, an EAC child policy was passed in March 2016. Mr Tayebwa concluded by underlining that EAC hopes to extend its mandate and work with the ACERWC to harmonize activities on the African Children's Charter and its implementation.

c. CSO Forum

In this panel the CSO forum was represented by Mr Mr Desmond Nyuma Mhango, member of the Executive Committee of the CSO Forum. He started his presentation by informing participants that the CSO Forum is created to support the ACERWC's mandate as a platform for CSO engagement. It coordinates CSOs in the production of CSO reports. It was also mentioned that the CSO Forum attends the sessions of the Committee and issue various statements to the ACERWC.

d. Discussions

Following the presentations, Ammb Wael Mohamed Attiya, Panel Chair, pointed out that in all works of human rights NHRIs, RECs, CSOs and State Parties are important. In Egypt, for example, government cooperates with CSOs in the implementation of human rights programmes. NHRIs play a very important role by monitoring implementation, advocacy for ratification, and review of reservations. Hence it is important to have coordination among the four actors.

During the discussions, it emerged that engagement of the EAC with states takes place during the summit of head of states. The assembly has given power to the council of ministers which the Secretariat deals with. Currently there is no strong relationship with EAC and ACERWC, but the EAC Secretariat can identify what can be done. It came out that the EAC can remind Partner States to report to the ACERWC when they are reporting to the EAC. It was further elaborated that implementation in EAC happens at national level hence the REC does not directly work with the ministries concerned with child rights. It only works with the ministries responsible for EAC affairs.

The representative from Gambia wanted to know how NANHRI assists in the creation of NHRIs and whether the network aspires to see all African countries having NHRIs. The response was that the network is merely a coordination mechanism since the creation

of NHRIs is done through national legislation. The political will to have an NHRI rests with the States.

Mauritania wanted to know if there is any mechanism which allows NHRI to engage the with the ACERWC. In response, it was mentioned that there is no mechanism but the issue has been noted as important and will be tabled during the upcoming ACERWC session for its consideration. It was also pointed out that NANHRI has launched a guideline on the role of NHRIs in the implementation of the decisions of the African Commission and the Court on Human and People's Rights. ACERWC is of the view that the Guides could be amended to include the Committee.

12. Thematic sessions

These sessions considered good practices and challenges with respect to three sets of issues: access to basic social services, violence against children and conflict and crisis as they affect children's rights and wellbeing.

12.1. Access to education and health care services

The session was facilitated by Plan International and Save the Children with an additional experience sharing on education by the Government of Mauritius. The two organizations made a joint presentation followed by group discussions.

a. Access to education

Plan International led the presentation and discussion on education. Ms Yodit Mekuria from Plan International started the presentation by emphasizing that we need to talk about access to education with particular attention to children as children are dependent on adults and also lack of access to education affects the future of the children. The reference documents on matters of education were cited as the African Children's Charter and Agenda 2040, which represents the African Union's vision for children in the next 25 years.

Children's right to education was presented as a right in itself, but also a means to enjoy other rights. Ms Yodit highlighted that the essential elements of education were itemized as accessibility, affordability, adaptability and acceptability. The focus of the Forum was on accessibility being the most basic aspect. Ms Yodit continued to explain that accessibility of education should be to all children particularly vulnerable children. This includes:

- Physical accessibility which entails that safe environment should be provided, and has to be accessible to younger children, girls, as well as children with disabilities; and

- Economic accessibility which entails that primary education should be free and compulsory.

b. Access to health care series

Ms Angela Muriuki from Save the Children made the presentation on access to health services. The World Health Organization perspective was used in defining health as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. The reference documents were same as education (African Charter and Agenda 2040). A 3 delays model was shared to explain why people don't use health services, namely:

- 1st delay- lack of knowledge at the house about services;
- 2nd delay- lack of infrastructure;
- 3rd delay- lack of appropriate health service such as personnel and health care facilities

Ms Muriuki underlined that access to health services includes physical accessibility, but is not limited to geographical accessibility since it includes security and other factors. It was further noted that accessibility is further defined in terms of availability (presence of health facilities); accommodation (the capacity of the health care service to accommodate the provision of service to all children); affordability (cost which takes into account transportation and opportunity costs); and acceptability including socio-cultural considerations.

c. Group discussions on good practices and challenges

The group discussions focused on access to education for girls and other disadvantaged children as well as removing cost of barrier to access to health. The groups were organized around language with two being francophone and two Anglophone.

From the group discussions, countries reported that most countries provide free access to primary education including a few countries allowing pregnant girls back to school after giving birth. However, economic and financial reasons were raised as challenges holding children back from going to school. The main challenges in access to education include lack of infrastructure, school drop outs due to pregnancies, early and forced marriage and household chores for girls. Furthermore, the discussions highlighted that birth registration remains a barrier as many countries require it for school enrolment.

The barriers to health came out as high costs leading to donor dependence, poor quality of services with Equatorial Guinea citing budget constraints as the explanation, and lack of proper monitoring. Additionally it was noted that personnel movement to the private sector is a barrier due to poor remuneration at public health care centers. Mauritius

cited a good practice as provision of free immunization and health care based on a clear government budget allocation.

d. Mauritius experience sharing: on education for girls and other disadvantaged children

Citing Article 11 of the African Children's Charter, Mrs Pillay the representative of Mauritius' Ministry of Education shared the experience of Mauritius and the measures it has taken to ensure access to education in accordance with the provision. It was informed that Mauritius has a National Gender Policy Framework which has components of equity in access to education, relevance and achievement. It was indicated that equality of men and women is enshrined in the constitution as well as in budgeting for education. Ms Pillay highlighted that there is no affirmative action for girls as there is no need for such treatment in the Mauritius. Education is free and compulsory for all children until the age of 16. Transport to all children going to school is also free. It was indicated that education facilities are available; the national curriculum has been revised to enhance relevance and remove gender sensitive stereotypes from the education system; and all data is analyzed gender wise.

In relation to pre-education, it was informed that Mauritius has an Early Childhood Care and Education Authority where a per capita grant is provided for all pre-school children enrolled. Pre-primary education is being included in all public primary schools. In addition, it was informed that there are 30 schools for disadvantaged children.

In terms of secondary education, Ms Pillay indicated that the curriculum has been reviewed to enhance relevance and introduce new subjects. All subjects are available to all children (no gender bias), and secondary school examination fees are fully paid to all children irrespective of status but depending on attendance. Ms Pillay explained that the government encourages students coming from low income families through cash rewards and social security grants and that such support has reduced rate of dropout and increased enrolment rate. Moreover, it was indicated there is a student tracking system to ensure compulsory education until the age of 16 as well as national education counseling sessions provided by social workers. Scholarships are also offered for tertiary education.

For special education needs, Ms Pillay highlighted that the budget has doubled in the past three years, and inclusive education is gradually being provided. All new secondary schools have ramps and adjusted toilets to enhance disability inclusion. Teachers are assigned to blind and deaf students to assist them in normal schooling as well as during examinations. Students with disabilities are also benefitting from a new scholarship scheme.

Finally Ms Pillay underlined some of the few challenges with regards to access to education within Mauritius including high rate of failure at the end of primary school; high repetition at the secondary level; low enrollment of girls in science subjects; and underperformance of boys.

12.2. Violence against children

Facilitated by Equality Now, African Child Policy Forum, World Vision and AfriChild, the session started with a gallery walk. The gallery exhibited un-edited children's voices collected by Equality Now on violence against children. Participants were able to capture different experiences of children on violence within homes and other institutions as well as during conflicts. Children are indeed abused by those expected to take care of them.

a. Initiatives towards ending violence against children

African Child Policy Forum, represented by Dr Lucyline Nkatha Murungi, then presented current issues on violence against children. She highlighted States should address violence against children due to the current global commitments contained in the SDGs (target 16.2), African Agenda 2063, and Aspiration 7 of Agenda 2040; and high cost of non-compliance with such commitments. The presentation underscored the measures needed to address violence including commitment to the cause of ending violence against children, partnership, allocation of all types of resources including technical and social resources, and accountability to implement the commitments. The presentation shared existing partnerships including the Global partnership to end violence against children and the African partnership to end violence against children. Dr Murungi highlighted that Global Partnership is founded on the basis of Agenda 2030 of the SDGs which aims at building political will, accelerating action to end violence against children, strengthen collaboration, and provide financial support. In the Global Partnership strategies to end violence include ensuring safety, supporting caregivers, establishing norms and principles, strengthening income and economic empowerment, and providing support services and education. Tanzania, Uganda and Nigeria are pathfinder countries for the global partnership hence there is a need to learn from them. Dr Murungi also introduced participants with the African partnership which is under formulation currently. She informed that the African Partnership is not a sub-set of the Global Partnership; rather it is an independent initiative launched in 2015. The main drivers for the partnership include bringing African countries together to learn from one another; unifying voice at the regional level so that African Countries are on the same page when they appear at the global level; creating coordination among the various initiatives; and collectively show our achievements at the global level. Finally Dr Murungi underlined that the Goal of the African Partnership is political will strengthening,

facilitate cross-learning, reflect Africa's position at global level, and accelerate national action in addressing violence against children.

b. Risk and protective factors for violence against children

A representative from AfriChild shared a presentation on recent research focusing on risk and protective factors for violence against children with a focus on the situation of children in residential care facilities. The research used child friendly methodologies to capture what children in residential care in Uganda experience. Some of the key experiences included: child labour, exclusion of HIV positive children, denial of food, doing house work even during examinations, sexual violence (inappropriate touching of girls and boys, verbal insults, child to child sexual interaction, rape of boys, abuse of girls by male care takers), physical violence (beating, slapping, pinching, biting each other), psychological and emotional violence (reminding children of poor backgrounds, verbal abuse, segregation and discrimination, extreme punishment) and institutional confinement. The presentation further identified the consequences of these forms of violence include pregnancy, sodomy, injuries and health complications. Perpetrators of the violence are fellow children, older children, cleaners and care givers. It was informed that the study recommended counseling, sex education, teaching of ethics, skill empowerment and career guidance, motivating the children, light punishment, constant follow-ups, regulation of care facilities, and exploring of alternative care options to address the concerns. Finally it was proposed that child protection systems both in rural and urban areas should be promoted and supported.

Questions were raised to AfriChild on how children are admitted to the care facilities; how violence happens in institutions; the existence of any regulations; availability of reintegration process or alternative care; the establishment of inspection system to monitor the residential care facilities; and the development of standards for facilities.

In response it was pointed out that children end up in the residential care facilities when they are abandoned or when their parents surrender them. Inspections are conducted but abuses persist meaning that the facilities may not be doing their job properly. It was also indicated that there is no proper regulation of the residential care facilities. Alternative care is being explored in Uganda as a solution.

In the continued discussions, participants stressed that light punishment as a recommendation is not appropriate and hence positive disciplining should be recommended. Somalia shared its experience on informal foster care as a mechanism that many families use hence the country does not have residential care. Niger also shared underlining that children are in danger even if they are within the family. For Niger, violence against children is addressed from a systems perspective. Once a report is received about children's situation, police will investigate and develop a report with

social workers and submits the report to the child court. If the child has a family, the court will call upon the parents and assess the reason and try to sort out the problem. If the court believes that the family is not the best environment, children will be transferred to the care facilities. The social workers do the inspection periodically and this regulation creates accountability.

c. AU campaign on ending child marriage

Mrs Dikéré Marie-Christine BOCOUM, the AU Special Rapporteur on Ending Child Marriages presented on the campaign and prevailing issues for the attention of the State Parties and other participants. Mrs BOCOUM started by highlighting that Article 21 of the African Children's Charter prohibits child marriage and that Article 2 defines children as those below the age of 18. Accordingly she mentioned that the age of marriage is 18 and the African Children's Charter makes it compulsory to register every marriage. The Special Rapporteur explained why Africa needed a special measure to tackle the child marriage problem by making reference to the fact that out of the 41 countries affected by child marriage globally, 30 are in Africa, and out of the 28 girls who get married each minute 17 of them live in Africa. She stressed that if no progress is made, 950 million girls will be in early marriages in 2050 as per UNICEF estimates.

In her presentation Mrs BOCOUM indicated that the effects of early marriages include poor physiological development which does not allow them to hold the responsibility of marriage, early child pregnancy which leads to death of mothers, transmission of HIV, and social consequences caused by dropout from school that leads to low education rates with adverse effects on social development. Given these effects, the AU reacted in 2014 to this phenomenon even if Agenda 2063 has some indications. Africa has launched a campaign to end child marriage which makes African the first to launch a campaign like this. It was informed that to date the campaign has been launched in 20 countries. Mrs BOCOUM mentioned that the campaign looks at legislative reform, strict penalties of perpetrators, national strategies to eradicate child marriage, establishment of monitoring and evaluation frameworks, effective involvement of all actors, and finally reducing rate of child marriage

It was also indicated that within the Structure of the AU a Goodwill Ambassador and a Special Rapporteur have been appointed. Mrs BOCOUM presented that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur is to establish normative framework, undertake evaluation, fact finding and monitoring missions, collect best practices, and undertake dialogue with all stakeholders like children, CSOs, states, community leaders. Another initiative of the AU mentioned in the presentation is the adoption of a declaration to end child marriage in 2015.

Mrs BOCOUM stressed that the prohibition of child marriage is featured in the African Children's Charter, and hence State Parties should indicate the measures taken to address issues of child marriage when they are submitting their State Party reports to the ACERWC. It was further pointed out that the Special Rapporteur wishes to work in close collaboration with States and other organizations. Such partnership will facilitate the achievement of the goal set out in Agenda 2040 and Agenda 2063 to create an Africa fit for children. Finally, Mrs BOCOUM informed participants that a Joint General Comment on Ending Child Marriage has been developed by the ACERWC and the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights and encouraged States to consider it in their activities and also to include its implementation in their reports.

d. Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism

Mr Willy Buloso, the African Regional Coordinator of ECPAT was allowed to make a presentation on ECPAT's Global Study on Sexual Exploitation of Children in Travel and Tourism. The presentation started by introducing the work of ECPAT international which is aimed at ending sexual exploitation of children online, ending sexual exploitation of children by travelers and tourists, and ending child trafficking. Mr Buloso presented the main findings of the study which are: the high vulnerability of children to sexual exploitation in travel and tourism; the number has tripled from 1994 to date; tourism is no longer taking traditional method with local and national tourism as the internet has created a situation of "travel with no control"; and regulation and child protection is lagging behind. Based on the study, it was recommended to ensure implementation and enforcement of existing laws and policies; to strengthen international and regional collaboration to combat sexual exploitation; and to tailor services to the specific needs and perspectives of children.

Mr Buloso highlighted the way forward by indicating the need to collect more and comprehensive data on sexual exploitation for reporting and advocacy purpose; to establish better reporting procedure on sexual exploitation of children to treaty bodies, and to advocate for an optional protocol to the African Children's Charter on sexual exploitation of children to enhance monitoring by learning from the experience of the European Union.

e. Campaign of Girls not Brides

The Regional focal point of Girls not Brides, Ms Ruth Koshal, was allowed to make a brief presentation on their campaign. She highlighted that each year 15 million girls are married before the age of 18; that over 700 million girls alive today were married before this age; and also that by 2050, 1.2 billion girls will be married if no measure is taken. She cited countries with high rate of child marriage in Africa which are in the top list of the world including Niger, Central Africa Republic, Chad, Mali, Burkina, South Sudan

and Mozambique. The impact of these marriages include: health complication, physical and sexual abuse, poverty, inequality and lack of education. Ms Koshal underlined that the indicators and data required for child marriage are:

- Percentage of women married before 18 who are subjected to violence (Sources of data- UNICEF, national demographic survey);
- Total and age-specific rate of women subjected to psychological violence;
- Number of child marriage reported to police, and prosecuted and convicted;
- Existence of national strategy and plan of action; and
- Consultations with target population on accessing services for child survivors of violence.

The presentations indicated prevention strategies as mobilization and sensitization of communities and offering alternatives to girls. Finally, responses to child marriage were outlined by Ms Koshal that include screening, legal aid, counseling, including men and boys in response, sensitization and elimination of structural barriers.

12.3. Conflict and Crisis session

This session was facilitated by the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and Save the Children using role plays on conflicts and crises in different contexts (Tunisia, Burkina Faso, Botswana and South Sudan). The intention was to ensure capturing of issues and strategies for addressing conflicts and related crises in the abovementioned countries as a way of experience sharing.

The key issues emerging from the role plays included violations of children in institutions including Quranic schools, drop out of children from school during conflicts, unaccompanied children and those of refugees not well supported despite having laws and frameworks on education and addressing violations, lack of coordination within government ministries and agencies in addressing violence during conflicts, and paying lip service to child participation during conflicts and crises. It was observed that Children's basic needs and rights are neglected in conflict and crisis situations. Under-resourcing of institutions and organs for addressing the concerns of unaccompanied children is another challenge.

During the play, the participants were acting like the ACERWC and hence gave recommendations to the four States on the concerns raised. It was recommended that States should develop an action plan that targets prevention and responds to the needs of children affected by conflict and crisis. Actions should be undertaken by all partners and support should be solicited at all levels. Furthermore, it was emphasized that a proper structure should be developed to implement and monitor the action plan. Training on human rights for the military, protection of schools from attacks, and provision of basic services for refugee and displaced children were also raised as

recommendations. It was mentioned that lessons can be learnt from Nigeria who provides human rights training to the military personnel and from Uganda who has facilitated the integration of refugee children into the regular social services.

13. Launch of the Continental Study on the Impact of Conflict and Crisis on Children in Africa

The session on the Launch of the Continental Study started with a presentation by Mr. Ayalew Getachew from the Secretariat of the ACERWC on the main findings of the study. Following the decision of the AU Executive Council requesting the Peace and Security Council of the AU to cooperate with the ACERWC on the rights of children, the Peace and Security Council in 2014 proposed that the ACERWC undertakes a study to assess the situation of children in conflict. Mr Ayalew highlighted that the devastating effect of conflict on children was the driver for the study. The Study focuses on countries that are in active conflict, countries in fragile post-conflict situations, and countries in major humanitarian crisis. It was informed that the objectives of the Study are to assess the impact of conflict on education, health, nutrition, and security; to assess if countries have response mechanisms to the challenges; assess the role of children as victims and witnesses; and to collect and analyze the views of children on the impact of armed conflict on their rights. Mr Ayalew pointed out that according to the findings of the Study, conflict and crisis has the following impacts on children:

- separation from families and caregivers;
- sexual and gender based violence;
- food insecurity and lack of nutrition;
- destruction of health care services;
- emotional and psychological distress; and
- destruction of education.

In relation to responses, Mr Ayalew underlined that the Study found that the issue of conflict and crisis in many countries is left for CSOs which has led to a fragmented efforts. Finally, he revealed the recommendations of the Study, among others, adoption of rights based approach response; rebuilding of education and health care facilities; provide food aid; adopt prevention mechanisms; rehabilitate and reintegrate child victims; and end impunity by prosecuting perpetrators of violence.

Subsequently, Ms. Brenda Kariuki from World Vision made a statement. She stated that Africa has most of the conflict in the world and hence there is a need to address the scourge. Accordingly World Vision works in the areas of conflict and crisis. Ms Kariuki indicated that in line of its work that World Vision partnered with ACERWC in undertaking the Study. She expressed her confidence in the study being the beginning of a valuable opportunity to use evidence to bring change and recommendation at policy

making and in different levels. World Vision would where possible work within countries on the recommendations which are important to end violence against children. She concluded her speech by stressing that it takes all of us to end violence against children in conflict and crisis.

Finally, Mrs Dikéré Marie-Christine BOCOUM made a launching speech. She highlighted the findings and the recommendations of the Study and stressed on the need to enhance State accountability in this regard. She extended her appreciation to the Government of Mauritius for creating the opportunity to launch the study. She mentioned that the ACERWC extends its profound thanks to those who made the Study a success including the children who bravely shared their experience; government officials of Kenya, Nigeria, South Sudan, and Somalia; the AU Peace and Security Department; ACERWC partner organizations mainly World Vision, European Union, and UNICEF; and the Pan-African Research Services team. Mrs BOCOUM then officially launched the Continental Study on the Impact of Conflict and Crisis on Children in Africa.

14. Pledging session

The Experience Sharing Forum was concluded by pledges Member States, Representative of the East African Community and the Network of African National Human Rights Institutions made following the discussions on ratifications, reservations, and implementation of the African Children's Charter.

14.1. Pledges on Ratification

The Government of South Sudan pledged to speed up the ratification of the African Children's Charter and work together with developmental partners and UN agencies for financial and technical support.

The Government of Somalia promised to invite the ACERWC for an advocacy mission to create awareness among the cabinet and parliamentarians on the importance of ratification of the Charter. To this end, it was promised that the Government will develop an action plan and timeline for the ratification of the Charter. Furthermore, the Government pledged to develop a Child Act between 2018 and 2019.

The Government of Tunisia pledged to accelerate the ratification process of the Charter and further to submit its reports. It also vowed to raise awareness on the Charter.

14.2. Pledges on Reservations

The Government of Egypt pledged to consider the withdrawal of reservation Egypt has entered on article 21(2) of the Charter on the prohibition of marriage and betrothal of persons below the age of 18.

The Government of Sudan pledged to form a committee to study the possibility of withdrawing reservations and to finalize the withdrawal of the reservations it has made before 2019 which is the time for the submission of its periodic report. It furthermore promised to undertake ongoing work for the review and amendment of domestic laws to harmonize them with international and regional instruments.

The Government of Botswana pledged to withdraw its reservation on article 2 of the Charter on the definition of the child and to submit its combined initial and periodic reports by 31 December 2017.

14.3. Pledges on Reporting

The Government of The Gambia pledged to submit its combined initial and periodic report before the end of December 2017.

The Government of Mauritius vowed to submit its initial report before the end of 2017. Moreover, it assured to mobilize resources to translate the Charter to local languages and widely disseminate it, and to engage the National Children's Council in matters affecting children.

The Government of Swaziland pledged to submit its combined initial and periodic report by the end of December 2017. In relation to implementation of the Charter, it was promised that the Government will undertake committed interventions and collaborate with other stakeholders.

The Government of Seychelles pledged to finalize the compilation of its combined initial and periodic State Party report and submit to the Committee by 2018.

The Government of Niger pledged to continue the submission of reports and in one year time to start engaging the Children's Parliament and the National Council of Youth in the preparation of reports.

The Government of Burundi pledged to regularly submit its periodic reports.

The Government of Cameroon promised to continue to respect its obligation regarding submission of reports and also to take into consideration ACERWC's Concluding Observations in national works of child protection.

The Government of Guinea Equatorial promised to regularly submit its reports starting from 2018.

14.4. Pledges on Implementation

The Government of Burkina Faso pledged to produce a national report every year starting from 2018 on the situation of children's rights and to further use a compilation of the reports when submitting their periodic reports every three years.

The Government of Tanzania vowed to develop an action plan for the implementation of the concluding observations and recommendations of the ACERWC on its first periodic report. Furthermore, the Government of Tanzania promised to disseminate the action plan as well as the concluding observations at national, regional and local government levels. Finally, it was also promised to submit the next periodic report to the ACERWC in 2018.

The Government of South African promised to continue its efforts in the implementation of and reporting on the African Children's Charter.

The Government of Mauritania promised to pursue the implementation of the Charter and to submit its reports on time.

14.5. Pledges by supporting institutions

The EAC assured to engage the Republic of South Sudan to ratify the Charter and submit its initial report on time, and also to engage all the EAC Partner States for a timely submission of their State Party reports. Additionally, the EAC pledged to actualize a collaboration plan with the Secretariat of the ACERWC.

The two representatives of the Network of African National Human Rights Institutes represented the National Human Rights Institutions from Malawi and Nigeria. The National Human Rights Commission of Malawi promised to work with and support the Government of Malawi in the implementation and integration of the concluding observations of the ACERWC in various policies and national plans. Furthermore, it promised to monitor the implementation of the concluding observations. The National Human Rights Commission of Nigeria promised to undertake continuous engagement with the government and other stakeholders in the implementation of the Child's Rights Act; to monitor activities on the implementation of the Act, to engage the government in its future reports to the Committee, and to undertake advocacy to get regional states who have not yet signed the Child Rights Act to sign the same.

15. Vote of thanks

The representative of the Government of Mauritania, Mr Abdallahi Diakite, extended a vote of thanks to the host country and the ACERWC for organizing the Experience Sharing Forum.

16. Closing remarks by Mrs Goitseone Nanikie Nkwe (ACERWC)

Mrs. Nkwe thanked the participants for honoring the invitation of the Committee, making the sessions more interactive and for their commitments. She thanked State Parties and

indicated that the Charter is futile without their commitments. She added that the commitment of State Parties helps the Committee to track the extent to which Africa is ready to be fit for children. Mrs. Nkwe indicated that the Committee looks forward for States to familiarize themselves with Agenda 2040, implement it and include it in the development of strategies as well as in their reports to the Committee. She further recognized the support of international and local CSOs in the implementation of the Charter. Mrs. Nkwe expressed her gratitude for the Committee members and the Secretariat of the Committee. Finally, she thanked the Facilitator, the interpreters, and technicians. Mrs. Nkwe then officially closed the Forum.