



ACERWC

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

**STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS
AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD (ACERWC)
WORKING GROUP ON CHILDREN'S RIGHTS AND CLIMATE CHANGE
ON THE OCCASION OF EARTH DAY 2026
22 April 2026**

Today, 22 April, we come together to celebrate our shared home - Planet Earth.

The 2026 Earth Day theme, "Our Power, Our Planet," underscores the significant role of people, communities, and institutions in safeguarding the environment and advancing sustainable, equitable and rights-based solutions to the climate and environmental crisis.

On this occasion, the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC), through its Working Group on Children's Rights and Climate Change, joins the global community in reaffirming that environmental protection is inseparable from and non-negotiable in the realisation of children's rights in Africa. The Committee emphasises that children are not merely beneficiaries of environmental action, but rights holders and agents of change whose voices, leadership, and participation are essential to shaping a just and sustainable future.

Climate Change, Environmental Degradation and Children's Rights in Africa

The Committee recalls that Africa's children are among those most affected by climate change and environmental degradation even though the continent contributes the least to global emissions. Climate-induced droughts, floods, pollution, and ecosystem degradation continue to undermine children's rights enforced by the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Climate change violates children's rights articulated in some articles of the charter such as the right to life, survival and development (article 5), the highest attainable standard of health (article 14), education (article 11), the right to play (Art 12) and human dignity.

Convergence of Earth Day 2026 and the Day of the African Child 2026

The Committee notes that Earth Day 2026 coincides with the theme of the Day of the African Child 2026, "***Ensuring Universal Access to Water, Sanitation and Hygiene for Every Child in Africa.***" This convergence presents a timely opportunity to reiterate that all stakeholders have a critical role to play in ensuring that present and future generations of children grow up in environmentally sustainable communities. It further underscores the need for climate action that is child-responsive and advances universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene as mutually reinforcing priorities.



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The ACERWC recognises the African child is not only the inheritor of the earth but also its guardian through article 31. It recognises that children's duty to their community begins with the protection of the land that sustains it.

Our Power, Our Planet: A Call for Child-Centred Action

The Committee reiterates that environmental and climate policies need to be based on the rights of children and be guided by the best interests of the child, guarantee non-discrimination, and ensure meaningful child participation and engagement in line with articles 3, 4, 5, 7 and 14 of the African Children's Charter.

Considering the above, the Committee calls upon States Parties as they commemorate Earth Day to;

- **Put children first in climate and environmental action** by ensuring that the best interests of the child guide all decisions affecting water, sanitation, hygiene, and environmental protection.
- **Guarantee universal, equitable and climate-resilient access** to water, sanitation and hygiene for every child, including in schools, health facilities, informal settlements, refugee settings, rural and climate-affected areas.
- **Prevent environmental pollution and ecosystem degradation** that undermine children's rights to life, health, and development, including the protection of water sources from contamination.
- **Close inequality gaps by prioritising children in vulnerable situations** like girls, children with disabilities, displaced children and those living in poverty or climate-hotspot regions ensuring non-discrimination in all climate and WASH interventions.
- **Empower children as agents of change** by guaranteeing meaningful child participation, engagement and access to child-friendly information in climate, environmental and WASH decision-making processes.
- **Invest, measure and account** by allocating adequate, child-sensitive financing to climate-resilient WASH, strengthening data and monitoring systems, and using clear, child-centred indicators to track progress and ensure accountability for results.

Conclusion

On Earth Day 2026, the ACERWC reaffirms that protecting the planet is inseparable from protecting children's rights. Ensuring universal access to water, sanitation, and hygiene for every child in Africa is both an environmental necessity and a legal obligation under the African Children's Charter. The Committee further calls for the inclusive meaningful participation and engagement of children in the commemoration of Earth Day, as well as for the deliberate support to enable them to exercise their



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voice, leadership and collective power to protect their planet, shape climate-responsive WASH solutions, and contribute to sustainable and climate resilient communities.

Done in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho

22 April 2026