

**AFRICAN UNION**

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**REGIONAL LAUNCH OF THE “UNITE FOR CHILDREN, UNITE  
AGAINST AIDS” CAMPAIGN,  
UN CONFERENCE CENTRE, ADDIS ABABA  
25 OCTOBER 2005**

**REMARKS BY DR. GRACE KALIMUGOGO  
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION**

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*Chairperson of the Programme,  
Representatives of the Ethiopian Government,  
Experts in children issues,  
Representatives of International Organizations,  
Members of the Press,  
Ladies and Gentlemen.*

On behalf of the African Union I feel honored to be part of this important launch “The Unite for Children, Unite against AIDS” Global Campaign. The AU commends the decision by UNICEF, UNAIDS and other partners to jointly address the important issues of children and AIDS. The Commission is ready to do its best to support and promote this initiative at continental level, which has the goal of ensuring that Africa’s children enjoy the best life has to offer, same as children in other continents. Development levels of family community or country depend on welfare of the child.

All of us gathered here are aware of the impact of HIV/AIDS has on Africa’s children. Simply put, African countries are faced with the greatest challenge of all time. In this connection, many children, unfortunately, have slipped through the cracks, and are leading a life of desperation and destitution, becoming adults before their time, and growing up with neither the nurture nor the support of parents, who themselves have succumbed to the disease. To make matters worse, many children are also living with the virus, without proper nutrition or shelter and with no recourse to life-prolonging anti-retroviral therapy and other treatment for controlling the opportunistic infections that threaten them; and no chance to enjoy their childhood.

Over the years, important commitments have been made towards improving the status of Africa's children. These include the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, the Millennium Development Goals particularly Goal No. 4, the African Common Position on Children and A World Fit for Children, as well as Continental and UN General Assembly Commitments on HIV/AIDS, among others.

The integration of HIV/AIDS in development initiatives such as the NEPAD and those of other AU Organs and Commissions, the relocation of AIDS Watch Africa to AU headquarters, and the ECA Commission for HIV/AIDS and Governance are among the major milestones in Africa's fight against AIDS. Some countries have also made progress in stabilizing and even reversing prevalence rates, mainstreaming HIV/AIDS in Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and National Development Plans, mobilizing internal resources and taking bold leadership steps to generally confront HIV/AIDS. Moreover, the Global Fund to fight AIDS, TB and Malaria is ensuring that more external resources are available for related programmes. There are, therefore, many reasons for hope.

In July this year, African Heads of State and Government focused their deliberations on the African child. They requested the Regional Economic Communities (RECs) to lead the child survival agenda in their regions in collaboration with development partners and collaborate with AU Commission to coordinate and harmonize the programmes and strategies. Furthermore, UN Agencies, International Organizations and Development partners were urged to technically support Member States in the process of strategic planning, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of child policies; mobilize financial resources to be used at national level; and collaborate with the African Union and RECs in playing their roles. Among others, the AU Commission was also mandated to place commitments made by governments regarding children at the heart of the Africa Peer Review Mechanism (APRM) and report regularly to African Leaders on progress achieved in efforts to advance child survival and well-being.

These commitments are important because they represent Africa's consensus for action. But commitments in themselves benefit no one unless they are translated into visible action on the ground. This is the challenge we must face together. It is imperative that Africa, the United Nations, and the international community move beyond making commitments and then more commitments but not implementing them.

There is urgent need to act now because AIDS is unrelenting in its ferocity and because Africa's children can no longer afford to wait and forfeit their life

chances. What they receive as children controls what they become as adults. For example, if they receive abuse as children, they tend to become abusers. If they don't receive love, they will not give out love.

This campaign is most welcome as it is calling upon us to focus on the rather neglected area in AIDS control, that is, protecting children. I would like to pose a challenge to UNICEF and UNAIDS and other development partners. Please ensure that the campaign is owned and driven by governments, civil societies, communities and children themselves across Africa. The extent to which the campaign will be successful depends on how well it will empower communities to mobilize themselves and take action that safeguards their interests and those of their children.

It will be recalled that in May 2001, the Pan-African Forum on Children was held in Cairo, Egypt and adopted the African Common Position on the Future of Children. This was Africa's contribution to the May 2002 UN General Assembly Special Session on children. In view of the recent UN Review of the MDGs and the mandate in the Common Position, a mid-term review on the implementation of the Declaration and Plan of Action is called for in 2006. In this regard, I wish to call upon your usual collaboration to ensure that this exercise is successful.

I thank you very much and hope that close partnerships will be developed to effectively drive this campaign for the benefit of all Africa's children.