

AFRICAN UNION

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UNION AFRICAINE

UNIÃO AFRICANA

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**SEVENTH MEETING OF THE AFRICAN
COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE
RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD
ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA
19 – 21 December 2005**

7TH MEETING OFACRWC

R E P O R T

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I. INTRODUCTION

The 7th 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 19th to 21st December, 2005.

II. ATTENDANCE

2. The meeting was attended by the 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 Director of the AU Department of Social Affairs.

i) Remarks by AU Commissioner for Social Affairs

4. The Director of Social Affairs read the statement on behalf of Adv. Bience P. Gawanas, AU Commissioner for Social Affairs.

5. Adv. Gawanas welcomed all Committee Members, in particular the newly elected ones, as well as all participants, to the AU Commission Headquarters. She noted that all those working on the ground were aware of the real situation of children in Africa. However, children still remain the most vulnerable in all situations and changes taking place in the continent. This was so partly because commitments made were not translated into concrete actions and resources were also not made available to address children issues. More political will, perseverance and seriousness were, therefore, required to tackle the problems related to children. She then recalled the mandate of the African Committee and proposed that the priority action to be undertaken by the Committee should be to obtain more ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

6. She informed the meeting that the AU Commission had received the reports from the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Republic of Mauritius. She called on the Committee to finalise the procedures for considering State Parties' reports so that at its next meeting it could start examining the reports. In this regard, she requested the Committee to draw inspiration from other instruments and learn from experiences of other institutions dealing with children's rights issues.

7. She also informed the Committee that the AU Commission was finalizing the recruitment of the Secretary to the Committee and that UNICEF had approved the funds for assisting the Secretariat of the Committee with a Senior Policy Officer (Legal) and an Administrative Secretary. Similarly, UNICEF would enhance the capacity of the Department of Social Affairs by sponsoring a Senior Policy Officer to follow-up on the implementation of the African Common Position on Children and the programme on children infected and affected by HIV/AIDS.

8. Finally, she called on Committee Members to take up the challenge and intensify their efforts to focus on achievable programmes that would be result-oriented. She informed the meeting that the AU Commission would convene a mid-term review meeting in 2006 to assess the level of implementation of the Plan of Action on children and called on all partners to support it in that endeavour.

ii) Swearing in of New Members of the Committee

9. The following six new Members of the Committee, who were elected by the Fifth Session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government in Sirte, Libya, in July 2005, were 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:

-	Mr. Moussa Sissoko	-	Mali
-	Ms Boipelo Lucia Seithamo	-	Botswana
-	Mrs. Mamosebi T. Pholo	-	Lesotho
-	Hon. Justice Martha Koome	-	Kenya
-	Mrs. Marie Chantal Koffi Appoh	-	Cote d'Ivoire
-	Mrs. Seynabou Ndiaye Diakhate	-	Senegal

iii) Consultation among Committee Members

10. After the opening ceremony, Members of the Committee held an informal closed consultative meeting to discuss some procedural and administrative issues.

IV. PROCEDURAL MATTERS

a) Elections of Officers

11. The Committee elected the following Officers to coordinate its work for the next two years:

-	Chairperson:	Mr. Jean Baptiste Zoungrana
-	First Vice-Chairperson:	Mrs. Mamosebi T. Pholo
-	Second Vice-Chairperson:	Mrs. Marie Chantal Koffi Appoh
-	Third Vice-Chairperson :	Hon. Justice Martha Koome
-	Rapporteur:	Mr. Moussa Sissoko
-	Deputy Rapporteur:	Ms Boipelo Lucia Seithamo

Adoption of the Agenda and Programme of Work

12. The Agenda and Programme of Work were adopted with some amendments related to the order of the items.

V. PROCEEDINGS OF DELIBERATIONS

Agenda Item 3: Matters arising from the 6th Meeting

13. The Representative of the AU Commission explained that the report highlighted the recommendations adopted on the items discussed during the Sixth Meeting. It was also indicated that the Chairperson of the Committee presented that report to the 7th Session of the AU Executive Council held in Sirte in July 2005.

14. During the debate, it was highlighted that matters arising should not only reflect the recommendations of the previous meeting but should also include progress report on their implementation and constraints encountered.

15. On the ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, it was recalled that at one of its meetings, the Committee had agreed on a schedule for Committee Members to undertake lobbying and sensitization missions in countries which have not yet ratified the Charter. However, there had been no follow-up on that issue.

16. On the issue of communication, it was inquired whether the Office of the Legal Counsel was consulted as requested by the Sixth Meeting. It was indicated that this was done and that the Memo from the Legal Counsel as well as the document received from the Centre for Human Rights, Uganda, have been distributed to Committee Members. Moreover, it was noted that the issue would be debated under item 7 of the Agenda.

Agenda Item 4: Brainstorming session on cooperation and interaction with Partners

17. The Committee heard the statement by H.E. Madam Salamata Sawadogo, Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights. She expressed her appreciation for the opportunity offered her to address the Committee. She informed participants that she had been chairing the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights (ACHPR) for the past two years and that the Commission had continued to promote the Committee on the Child since its inception adding that the ACHPR had participated actively in the drafting of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child and mounted a sensitization campaign for its adoption by Member States.

18. She said that the mandate of ACHPR was to promote and protect human and peoples' rights while that of the Committee of Experts related

specifically to the protection of the rights and welfare of children in Africa. She intimated that the task of the Committee was difficult because children were always vulnerable and their rights constantly violated. She expressed ACHPR's support to the Committee in its relentless efforts and deplored the fact that like the ACHPR the African Committee did not have enough resource to carry out its work.

19. Madam Sawadogo emphasized that ACHPR and the African Committee were waging the same struggle and facing the same challenge, adding that the two institutions should develop a strategic partnership that would comprise exchange of information and experiences on human rights promotion and protection, including the specific rights of the African Child and participation in the meetings of each other's institution. The modalities of such partnership as well as the financial implication thereof should be studied by the two parties. She appealed to Member States of the African Union to lend their support to the ACHPR and the African Committee. To this end, she proposed the establishment by the AU Commission of a voluntary contribution fund as decided at the Kigali ministerial meeting. She concluded by wishing the Committee full success in its deliberations.

20. In the debate that ensued, the following were raised:

- a) participants congratulated the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights(ACHPR) for her statement;
- b) regarding the Voluntary contribution Fund, it was explained that the Ministerial Meeting on Human Rights held in Kigali recommended that a Voluntary contribution Fund be established to raise awareness, promote and protect human rights. However, modalities for its establishment still have to be worked out;
- c) it was confirmed that children's rights were human rights;
- d) participants were informed of a Tripartite Meeting to be organized jointly by the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa, Save the Children – Sweden, and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

21. Finally, the Chairperson thanked Mrs. Sawadogo and congratulated her for her re-election as Chairperson of the ACHPR.

22. The Committee then heard a presentation from Ms. Mireille Affa'a Mindzie, Legal Officer from the Institute for Human Rights and Development in Africa, who briefed the Committee on the activities carried out by the Institute, in collaboration with Save the Children – Sweden, to promote the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child as well as the Workshops organized for NGOs and Civil Society Organisations (CSOs) to that effect. She added that the Institute for Human Rights and Development has been following the work of the African Committee and looked forward to better collaboration between the two parties. In this regard, she expressed the wish that the Committee would interact more with NGOs and CSOs and

that the latter would be allowed to participate in the meetings of the Committee.

23. On her part, Ms Stella Ayo-Odongu, Programme Coordinator from the Uganda Child Rights NGO Network, reiterated that the Committee should engage more with NGOs and CSOs in its effort to promote the rights of the child. She proposed that the Committee could adopt measures to mainstream NGOs and CSOs in its work.

24. In the debate, participants raised the following issues, that:

- a) the NGOs and CSOs were carrying out commendable work in promoting the rights of the child;
- b) the Committee should therefore interact more with them;
- c) the NGOs and CSOs could advocate and lobby for the ratification of the African Charter as well as assist Member States in preparing the reports;
- d) the African Committee should develop a legal framework to see how to cooperate with partners and NGOs

Agenda Item 5: Follow-up on the Plan of Action (2005-2009) – Proposal on priority projects

25. In his presentation, the Chairperson recalled that the draft Plan of Action had been discussed during the previous meetings of the Committee and amendments had been made in the document. Consequently, the amendments have been incorporated in the document and, as was also agreed, a budget proposal has been worked out. He highlighted that the budget proposal was divided into four components: Popularization of the rights as enshrined in the African Charter; Promoting and protecting the rights of the Child; Monitoring the implementation of the Charter; and Strengthening the institutional capacity of the Committee. Under each component, activities to be undertaken have been listed with the appropriate budget. He added that the Plan was made up as follows: the budgeting; the physical planning; the logical framework; the financial planning of activities; and a summary.

26. In the debate that ensued, Committee Members commended the Chairperson for the Draft Plan of Action. It was highlighted that the document could be used as a tool to raise funds from donors and partners. However, there was need to reorganize the document and find out how much the AU Commission was prepared to contribute. It was also pointed out that:

- there was a gross imbalance in the budgeting of the different components;
- the draft document should be shared with partners with a view to finding out how much they could contribute;
- the partners at national level could be utilized to implement some of the activities;

- how to raise the funds was a challenge to the Committee. In this regard, strategies should be developed which could include appeals to Heads of State;
- the budget could be revised after knowing the contribution of the African Union Commission

27. After a lengthy debate on the priority activity to be undertaken as well as the approach and strategy to be adopted with regard to the implementation of the Plan of Action, it was recommended that:

- a) The Secretariat of the Committee should scrutinize the document and come up with an organized Plan of Action;
- b) In this exercise, the Secretariat should highlight the value added of the Committee in promoting the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;
- c) The document should also spell out clearly the contributions of the AU Commission;
- d) Strategies on how to raise funds should be developed;
- e) The document should also be reviewed in such a way that it would be easy to sell to partners. In this regard, a Roundtable with donors and partners could be envisaged, if necessary.

28. The Plan of Action was adopted on the understanding that the Secretariat of the Committee would scrutinize the document and come up with a more organized document.

Agenda Item 6: Follow-up on Modalities for handling State Party Reports

29. In presenting the report, Mme Polo explained that the document had already been considered in detail during previous meetings. However, due to some amendments which have been incorporated therein, the document was being presented again. For the benefit of the new Committee Members, Mrs Polo gave an extensive brief on the report.

30. The AU representative informed the Committee that the AU Commission has received two reports: one from the Republic of Mauritius in English and the other from the Arab Republic of Egypt in Arabic. However, the reports could not be translated into the other working languages of the Committee because of the work load of the AU Conference services.

31. In the debate, a number of concerns were raised:

- whether a Committee Member could assist his/her country in preparing the report to be submitted;
- whether the AU Commission was prepared to bear the extra costs which would be entailed in the Committee having to hold longer sessions to consider State Parties' reports;
- if other Member States, whose reports were due, have been requested to submit their reports;

- whether one NGO or a coalition of NGOs could forward complementary or alternative reports;
- what should be done to ensure the translation of reports received. It was proposed that one way out would be to request Member States to submit their reports in English and French;
- State parties could be requested to submit their reports in English and French and limit the number of pages;
- What was the synergy between the reports sent to the UN Committee and the ACERWC;
- NGOs could submit reports simultaneously with the State Party

32. After further debate on issues raised, it was noted that:

- a) it would not be proper to overburden a State Party by requesting it to submit its report in both English and French;
- b) A Committee Member could assist his/her country in preparing the report but the State Party should have no obligation to involve the Committee Member;
- c) the practice in the AU Commission concerning other Committees should be studied and the same method used to translate the reports;
- d) the initial reports were usually comprehensive and bulky but the periodic reports could be limited to a number of pages to be decided upon by the Committee;
- e) Governments could also submit complementary reports;
- f) Paragraph 25 of the Guidelines for Reporting was clear on the reports to be submitted to the ACERWC.

33. A protracted debate ensued on complementary and alternative reports. It was finally decided that the supplementary reports to be submitted by State Parties should be titled "additional report". Complementary reports would be the preserve of NGOs.

34. Finally, the Committee agreed that:

- a) The AU Commission should utilize the same practice as other Committees to have reports of State Parties translated into the working languages of the Committee;
- b) Reports to be submitted by State Parties should be in conformity with the Guidelines on Reporting which has already been submitted to them;
- c) Supplementary reports to be submitted by State Parties should be called "Additional Report"
- d) NGOs should not be forced to submit reports. Article 69 of the Rules of Procedure should be applied.

35. The Report was unanimously adopted by the Committee.

Agenda Item 7: Modalities for considering communications received (Article 44 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child)

36. The Committee was informed that, as agreed during the 6th Meeting of the Committee, the advice of the AU Legal Counsel was sought with regard to a communication received from a Group from Uganda. The Office of the Legal Counsel had indicated that the Committee had the mandate to receive and consider such communications. The memo from the Legal Counsel as well as the document have been distributed to Committee Members.

37. Mrs. Polo also explained that she has distributed to Committee Members draft guidelines on consideration of communication prepared by the Institute on Human Rights and Development in Africa as well as a resolution on granting observer status from the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights to assist the Committee in developing its own procedure. She stressed that Article 44 of the African Charter was clear on who could submit a communication to the Committee. However, the Committee should have its own procedure on granting observer status.

38. The Representative of the Legal Counsel informed the Committee that the criteria for granting Observer Status and a System of Accreditation within the AU were formally adopted by the Sirte Summit in July 2005. However, the Committee could adopt its own criteria for granting observer status to organisations which have expertise in children's rights and welfare issues. She also informed the Committee that the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights has developed its own criteria and that the Committee could inspire itself from the AU as well as the ACHPR's models.

39. With regard to "communication" as defined in Article 44 of the African Charter, the Representative of the Legal Counsel explained that "communication" should be given a wider meaning to include complaints and grievances. This would give an opportunity to individuals to raise issues with the Committee. Otherwise this article would be restricted only to information and communication.

40. In the debate that followed, the Committee felt that Members should compare the documents and come up with a draft on the procedures to follow. Concerns were also raised on how to deal with the complaints received from Uganda. In this regard, it was felt that since the Committee had not yet adopted its procedures for consideration of communication, it could only acknowledge receipt of the complaint indicating that the complaint would be dealt with after the adoption of the procedures.

41. After considering the various proposals advanced during the debate, it was finally agreed that:

- a) the AU Legal Counsel would come up with drafts on: procedures for considering communications as well as criteria for granting observer status which would be forwarded to all

- Committee Members for their consideration and inputs. The drafts should be ready by end of February 2006;
- b) Committee members would send their inputs to Mrs. Diakhate, a member of the Committee, to harmonize all inputs and send the documents back to the AU Commission;
 - c) The drafts would be presented to the next meeting of the Committee for consideration.

Agenda Item 8: Matters raised by Committee Members

42. Under that item two reports were presented:

a) Fact Finding Mission to Northern Uganda

43. Dr. Assefa Bequele presented in detail a report on the fact finding mission he undertook together with the out-going Chairperson of the Committee, Lady Justice Aluouch, to Northern Uganda from 15-19 August, 2005. He highlighting: the background of the mission; the objectives, activities undertaken, and the situation of children in Northern Uganda. He described the atrocities which were happening to children and emphasized the urgent need to put an end to them. He stated that the mission made clear recommendations in the document which needed to be followed up.

44. The AU Representative informed the Committee that although the Social Affairs Department deals with children issues, the Peace and Security Department also has programmes on children in conflict situation and that a framework on post-conflict reconstruction and development was being developed. It would therefore be appropriate for the the Committee to laise with the Peace and Security Department in implementing the recommendations spelt out in the document.

45. In the debate that ensued, Committee Members commended Dr. Assefa for the report. The following issues were raised:

- a) what criteria were used to select the Members of Parliament;
- b) the need for the report to be widely publicized;
- c) what actions were being taken by the Ugandan Government to stop the atrocities;
- d) there should be a follow-up to the recommendations;
- e) the AU Commission should take up the issue and provide a platform for dialogue for peace.

46. Some Committee Members felt that since the issue was sensitive, the Committee should act with caution and abide to AU's rules and procedures. It was also indicated that the situation in Northern Uganda should be adressed in its broader perspective and not limited to chidlren only.

47. After an extensive exchange of views and recognizing the need for urgent action, the Committee took note of the report. It was agreed that:

- a) the AU Commission should also take note of the report;

- b) the AU Commission should take appropriate measures to implement the recommendations contained in the report including the transmission of the report to the Government of Uganda and report back to the Committee of action taken.

b) Second Workshop on the Procedures of the ACERWC

48. Mr. Zoungana briefed the Committee on his participation in the Second Workshop on the Procedures of the ACERWC organized jointly by the Institute of Human Rights and Development in Africa and Save the Children – Sweden, in Senegal from 20-24 June, 2005. He highlighted the salient points raised in the presentations made at the Plenary and the Working Groups. The outcome of the meeting was the establishment of a network of NGOs to promote the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. Finally, he made three proposals that the Committee: strengthens its collaboration with partners; expedites the adoption of its procedures to deal with communication; and convenes a session to exchange views and understand how to interpret the provisions of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

49. Committee Members commended Mr. Zoungana for the report. *It was* noted that the Committee and the partners were both advocating for the rights of the child and promoting the African Charter. The importance and the need for the Committee to interact with partners were also underscored. It was pointed out that in view of the new challenges which have emerged in the continent, such as HIV/AIDS and conflicts, there was need to review the African Charter.

Agenda Item 9: Theme of the Day of the African Child – June 2006

50. In presenting the report the AU Representative recalled that during its sixth meeting held in June 2005, the Committee did not discuss the item on the Day of the African Child. Thus the Committee did not decide on the theme for the June 2006 Day of the African Child (DAC). In this regard, therefore, the Secretariat was proposing that the theme be “Right to Protection: Stop Violence Against Children” .

51. In the debate that followed, the proportion and kind of violence against children were underscored. It was pointed out that the theme proposed was appropriate in view of the study being carried out by the United Nations on Violence against Children. It was, therefore, agreed that the broad theme would be “**Right to Protection: Stop Violence Against Children**” and that countries would be free to choose sub-themes in line with the overall theme.

Agenda Item 10: Any other business

Item 10 (a): Information on Coalition of African NGOs on Children (CANGOC)

52. Mr. Sissoko informed the Committee that during the United Nations Preparatory Sessions devoted to Children in May 2000, February 2001 and June 2001, African NGOs, had seized the opportunity to form an advisory group of African NGOs in favour of children, for a better strategy aimed at involving NGOs in the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the world Plan of Action for Children.

53. He further stated that the Preparatory Sessions contributed to the drafting of the document titled "***A World Fit for Children***" during the May 2002 United Nations Special Session on Children. Since June 2003, the advisory group organized a Constitutive General Assembly in Bamako, following sub-regional consultations held in Dakar in December 2000 and in Dar Es Salaam in March 2003.

54. The advisory group adopted the appellation of CANGOC. CANGOC is made up of over 240 NGOs grouped within 37 national coalitions and focal points in Africa. CANGOC has a 12 member Executive Committee including 3 children representing children's organizations and movements.

55. It also has an Executive Secretariat in Bamako and two (2) sub-regional co-ordination units in Dakar for West and Central Africa, and in Dar Es Salaam for East and Southern Africa. The background document will be sent to all the members of the Committee in due course.

b) AU Awards on Children

56. Adv. Bience P. Gawanas, AU Commissioner for Social Affairs congratulated the new Members of the Committee. She informed the Committee that the African Union Commission has decided to award various prizes, two of which would be for children. One of the prizes would be in recognition for children's champions who are active in promoting the rights and welfare of the African child and the other would be the Nkosi Johnson Award with special emphasis on HIV/AIDS. The first prize which would be awarded in June 2006, would focus on the children's champions and would be restricted to organisations which promote the rights and welfare of children. The Commissioner indicated that she would want Committee Members to be fully involved in the process and be part of the Jury. In this regard, a Concept note has been prepared and has been distributed to them. She underscored that the award would put the protection and promotion of the child in the forefront as well as give visibility to children issues within the AU Commission and the Committee.

57. Committee Members congratulated the AU Commission for this initiative and agreed that it would indeed give visibility to the Committee. They requested that the documents on the two awards be made available to them

in English and French to enable them study the award proposals and send their inputs. It was also pointed out that the AU Commission should prepare well for the award and make a lot of publicity for it. Assurance was given that all means of communication would be utilized to publicise the award and made it known.

58. It was finally agreed that:

- a) the AU Commission would finalize the documents, have them translated and forward them to the Committee Members;
- b) Committee Members would send their inputs and proposals to the AU Commission.

c) Induction Session for Committee Members

59. The above issue was raised during discussions on the AU Award. A proposal was made that an induction session for Committee Members be organised in order for Committee Members to familiarize themselves with the African Charter; organize their work better; define strategies on how to bring the Committee forward; and know more about the AU Commission and its structure.

60. It was agreed that the proposal was valid and that a retreat could be organised to that effect. It was decided that the matter would be followed up.

d) Secretariat of the Committee

61. The Commissioner informed the Committee that the AU Commission was in the process of recruiting a Secretary to the Committee. The AU Commission has also managed to obtain funds from UNICEF to enhance the capacity of the Secretariat of the Committee as well as the Department of Social Affairs. A project agreement was signed between the AU Commission and UNICEF to that effect.

62. The Commissioner also added that she has taken cognizance of the Plan of Action and the budget of the Committee for 2005-2009. In this regard, she advised that the Committee should undertake serious fund raising activities. However, she would also endeavour to obtain a percentage of the budget from the AU Commission.

e) Second International Policy Conference

61. Dr. Assefa Bequele, briefed the Committee on the Second International Conference being organised by the African Child Policy Forum on the theme "Violence Against Girls in Africa" in May 2006. He stated that the Conference would focus on violence against girls in Africa in three settings, namely, in the family, in school and in the community. He highlighted the level of participation as well as the partners involved. He indicated that he would want Committee Members to participate actively in the Conference and assist as facilitators and resource persons. He stated that the outcome of the Conference would be the adoption of a declaration to stop

violence against girls in Africa to be directed to the UN General Assembly in 2006. He also indicated that it would be cost effective if the next Committee meeting could be held back to back with the Second International Policy Conference.

62. Committee Members congratulated Dr. Assefa for organising the Conference and agreed that it would be an opportunity for them to widen their contacts and scope by interacting with a number of International Organisations, NGOs, Civil Society Organisations and other Organisations. It would also be an opportunity to popularize the work of the Committee. It was also pointed out that Committee Members should support each other.

63. Finally, it was agreed that efforts would be deployed to convene the next meeting of the Committee in conjunction with the Second International Policy Conference as it would be cost effective.

f) Coordination

64. The Representative of Save the Children – Sweden highlighted that there was need to coordinate various reports, in particular, the reports sent to the UN Committee and that for the African Committee.

65. The Committee agreed that there should be coordination but felt that this should be done at national level.

g) Nomination of Rapporteurs for State Parties Reports

66. The Committee nominated the following Committee Members as Rapporteurs to examine Reports received from the Republic of Mauritius and the Arab Republic of Egypt:

- Mauritius: Mme Pholo to be supported by Prof. Ebigbo
- Egypt: Mrs. Seithamo to be supported by Dr. Assefa

The reports would be examined at the pre-session at the next meeting of the Committee.

67. It was also agreed that the Secretariat would translate the reports into the working languages of the Committee and send them to Committee Members latest by February 2006.

h) Decisions of Sirte

68. Explanations were sought on Decisions EX/CL/233(VII) on the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child as well as Decision AHG/Dec.75(V) on Accelerating Action for Child Survival and Development in Africa to meet the MDGs adopted respectively by the Executive Council and Summit held in Sirte, Libya in July 2005.

69. The AU Representative explained that Decision EX/CL/233(VII) was adopted subsequent to the Report presented to the Executive Council by the Chairperson of the Committee. In paragraph 8 thereof the Commission was requested to study measures to renew the term of office of Committee Members for another term. No action has yet been taken on that paragraph. With regard to Paragraph 9, related to the strengthening of the Committee and its Secretariat, actions were underway to recruit a Secretary to the Committee and the AU Commission has signed a project proposal with UNICEF to enhance the capacity of the Committee.

70. Concerning Decision AHG/Dec.75(V), it was explained that the decision emanated after a Report presented to the AU Summit on 'Accelerating Action for Child Survival and Development in Africa to meet the MDGs', in particular, Goal 4 on reducing child mortality and morbidity. It was indicated that the decision defines the role to be played by various partners in implementing the decision. The AU Commission was mandated to carry out a number of activities. Regarding paragraph 9 (a) on the convening the Mid-term review of the African Common Position, the meeting would be held next year. On paragraph (c) on the violation of children's rights, the African Committee was expected to explore ways and means of interacting with other AU organs. On paragraph (d) on strengthening and supporting the African Committee, measures were already underway to strengthen the capacity of the Committee.

i) Investigation

71. In conformity with Article 45 of the African Charter, the Committee expressed the need to develop specific guidelines to enable it investigate measures taken to implement the provisions of the Charter by State Parties.

72. After a brief exchange of views, it was agreed that Mrs. Polo in collaboration with Mr. Zoungrana would develop draft guidelines for the consideration of the Committee at its next meeting.

Agenda Item 11: Adoption of the Draft Report

72. The Committee considered the Draft Report of the meeting as presented by the Rapporteur and adopted it with amendments.

Agenda Item 12: Closing

73. The Chairperson congratulated Committee Members and thanked them for their constructive and valuable contributions. He noted that the Committee adopted a number of important recommendations aimed at improving the welfare of Africa's children. He highlighted that the Committee has made considerable progress in its work as it managed to adopt the procedures to consider State Parties report as well as its Plan of Action for 2005-2009. It also debated on guidelines for receiving communication, granting of observer status and investigation. He called on Committee Members to continue to show the same spirit and determination in their work.

He then thanked the partners, the African Union Commission as well as the Interpreters for their cooperation and support. He wished everybody a Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. He also wished Committee Members a safe journey back to their respective countries.

73. In her closing remarks, Adv. Bience P. Gawanas, AU Commissioner for Social Affairs, noted that, during its three-day meeting, the Committee had debated in-depth pertinent issues that would contribute to move the Committee forward. She indicated that 2006 would mark a different era in the life of the Committee. She recalled the Unite for Children Unite against AIDS Campaign which was launched by UNICEF to reinforce initiatives to halt the spread of HIV/AIDS and its impact on children. She stated that in spite of all the initiatives, the Continent was still faced with the urgent challenge of dealing with children's problems. She assured participants of the continued commitment of the AU Commission to drive the children Agenda forward with a view to ensuring an Africa fit for Children.

74. The Commissioner underscored the fact that the Committee should strengthen its cooperation with the NGOs and the Civil Society Organisations as they could provide information on children's rights issues as well as share experiences with the Committee and the Social Affairs Department. These organizations could also lobby for the ratification of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. In this regard, she informed the meeting that the Republic of Mauritania has ratified the African Charter thus raising the number of ratification to thirty-eight (38). She also briefed participants on her meeting with the Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and People's Rights during which important issues such as social development, Female Genital Mutilation, girl child, malnutrition and MDGs were discussed. With regard to social protection of vulnerable children, she underlined that it was not enough to provide these children with social benefits and assistance but that ensuring their welfare and protection were equally important. She informed participants that the AU Commission was envisaging to conduct a study on social protection of the vulnerable group. Moreover, a mid-term review meeting to assess the implementation of the Plan of Action on Children would be convened in 2006.

75. Finally, she reiterated her congratulations to the new Committee Members and assured them of the continued support of the AU Commission. She called on partners and Committee Members to work in partnership with the AU Commission to make Africa a place fit for children.