

## STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2026

The African Committee of Experts on Rights of the Child (ACERWC/the Committee) joins the global community in marking International Women's Day 2026, under the theme, 'Rights. Justice. Action. For ALL Women and Girls'.

On this occasion, the Committee recognizes the gains achieved and the important steps African States have taken to improve the situations of girls including by ratifying regional and international instruments, adopting laws and national plans, expanding access to education, health and protection services, and creating spaces for girls' participation in policy and accountability processes. A particular positive trend observed is how girls across Africa are increasingly asserting their voices, including in the work of the Committee. In schools, communities, youth initiatives, and continental spaces like the Day of the African Child, they engage in discussions on issues that affect their lives, including education, climate justice, digital protection, and contribute to intergenerational dialogue. Their participation reinforces that girls are active contributors to the future of their societies.

The Committee further recognises persistent gaps and challenges, including: discriminatory laws and policies; weak implementation and enforcement; limited access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services; intersecting barriers linked to poverty, disability, displacement and conflict; entrenched harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM; inadequate data and monitoring systems; and insufficient investment in prevention, protection and empowerment programmes.

It is in this context that this year's theme assumes particular significance. Africa has the largest youth population in the world; the continent's future will therefore depend on the conditions under which girls participate in society. When girls remain in school, access health and protection services, participate in decisions affecting their lives, and transition into adulthood free from violence, the benefits are socio-economic and indeed intergenerational. Advancing the rights of girls is therefore central to the aspirations articulated in Africa's Agenda for Children 2040 and Agenda 2063: The Africa We Want.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the African Children's Charter) recognises the need for special measures to ensure the protection and advancement of the girl child, speaking directly to African realities. The Charter also obliges States Parties to adopt legislative and other measures to give effect to the rights enshrined within, and to discourage customs and traditions that undermine them. These obligations are further guided by the Charter's four guiding principles, non-discrimination, best interests of the child, survival and development, and child participation.

On this International Women's Day, the Committee calls upon all African Union Member States to:

- i. Fully implement Article 21 of the African Children's Charter by eliminating child marriage and other harmful social and cultural practices through effective enforcement of the law, preventive action, and sustained engagement with communities to address the social norms that sustain these practices;
- ii. Ensure that girls enjoy equal and effective access to education, including by addressing school exclusion linked to poverty, pregnancy, disability, conflict, displacement, and other intersecting forms of vulnerability;
- iii. Strengthen accessible and child-sensitive justice and protection systems so that girls can safely report violations, obtain effective remedies, and access appropriate health, psychosocial, and social support services; and
- iv. Create and sustain conditions in which girls are heard and their opinions given due weight, in accordance with the Charter's guarantees on the best interests of the child and the right of the child to express views.

Done in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho

08 March 2026