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## **Statement of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) on World Water Day 2026**

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC/the Committee) joins the global community in commemorating World Water Day 2026, observed under the theme “Water and Gender.”

This global commemoration takes place within a significant continental context, marked by the African Union Theme of the Year 2026: “Assuring sustainable water availability and safe sanitation systems to achieve the goals of Agenda 2063”, as well as the Day of the African Child (DAC) 2026 theme: “Ensuring universal access to water, sanitation and hygiene for every child in Africa.” These themes reflect a growing continental recognition that water security is central not only to sustainable development, but also to the survival, dignity and future of Africa’s children.

The Committee welcomes the adoption and launch of the Africa Water Vision 2063 and Policy as a landmark achievement towards ensuring universal, sustainable and equitable access to water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) across the continent. This milestone reflects a strategic paradigm shift that recognises water as a critical asset for development, promotes innovation and sustainability, and advances a water-secure, climate-resilient and inclusive Africa for present and future generations, in line with Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2040: Fostering an Africa Fit for Children’s Aspirations.

The Committee recalls that access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is fundamental to the realisation of the rights enshrined in the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. It is intrinsically linked to a wide range of interdependent and mutually reinforcing rights, including the rights to health, nutrition, education, protection, life, survival and development. Inadequate WASH services continue to undermine children’s well-being, increase child mortality, and constrain Africa’s development aspirations, particularly in light of rapid population growth and climate-related pressures. This requires not only expanding access to WASH services, but also ensuring the sustainable

management, protection and equitable use of water resources in the face of climate change, environmental degradation and growing demand.

Despite progress, the Committee remains concerned that significant disparities persist in access to WASH services across the continent, disproportionately affecting children in rural areas, informal settlements, and particularly those in humanitarian settings, conflict-affected contexts, and regions impacted by natural disasters such as droughts and floods. These situations exacerbate vulnerabilities, disrupt essential services, and expose children to heightened risks, including water-related diseases, mortality, displacement and protection concerns.

In alignment with the global and continental focus, the Committee underscores that girls bear a disproportionate burden where access to safe water and sanitation is limited. In many contexts, girls are primarily responsible for water collection, spending significant time and travelling long distances, often at the expense of their education, safety and well-being. This burden reinforces structural inequalities and exposes girls to increased risks of violence, abuse and exploitation, particularly in fragile and humanitarian contexts. The lack of safe, accessible and gender-responsive sanitation facilities further undermines girls' dignity, health and school participation, especially during menstruation.

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the African Children's Charter) obliges States Parties to ensure access to adequate safe drinking water, hygiene and environmental sanitation. The Charter further provides that it is incumbent upon States Parties to adopt legislative, administrative and other measures necessary for the effective implementation of all rights without distinction, in line with their indivisible and interdependent nature, including WASH as a core determinant of children's well-being. In this regard, States must prioritise disadvantaged children, demonstrate measurable progress, and refrain from invoking resource constraints to justify inaction or regression.

Consistent with the continental commitment to "leave no one behind," which requires inclusive, participatory and rights-based approaches that empower children, particularly girls and marginalised groups, in WASH governance and decision-making, the Committee recalls that the principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life, survival and development, and child participation must guide all WASH-related interventions. In particular, girls must be meaningfully involved in the design, implementation and monitoring of WASH policies and programmes.

In light of the above, and in alignment with the African Union Theme of the Year 2026, the DAC 2026 theme, and the Africa Water Vision 2063, the Committee calls upon Member States and stakeholders to:

- Adopt and strengthen legislative and policy frameworks recognising children's rights to water, sanitation and hygiene, aligned with international and regional standards, and incorporating the normative dimensions of availability, accessibility, quality, affordability and acceptability.

- Prioritise child- and gender-responsive WASH systems, ensuring safe, accessible and dignified services in schools, communities and humanitarian settings, with specific safeguards against violence and exploitation.
- Increase investment in sustainable, climate-resilient and inclusive WASH infrastructure, particularly in underserved, fragile and disaster-prone areas, in line with long-term development and resilience goals.
- Integrate child-sensitive and gender-responsive budgeting, ensuring adequate, transparent and accountable allocation of resources for WASH across sectors including health, education and social protection.
- Strengthen governance, accountability and justiciability frameworks, including independent oversight, accessible complaint mechanisms, and effective remedies for violations of children’s rights to WASH.
- Enhance data systems, monitoring and evaluation, including the collection of disaggregated data (by age, sex, disability and location), to inform evidence-based decision-making and track inequalities.
- Promote inclusive service delivery, ensuring that children in vulnerable situations—including girls, children with disabilities, and those in humanitarian and displacement contexts are not left behind.
- Ensure meaningful participation of children, particularly girls, in WASH planning and monitoring processes at all levels.
- Strengthen coordinated implementation of continental frameworks, including the Africa Water Vision 2063, Agenda 2063 and Agenda 2040, through integrated, cross-sectoral and results-oriented approaches.
- Promote the commemoration of the Day of the African Child 2026 and ensure the implementation of its recommendations, including those articulated in the DAC Concept Note and children’s outcome statements, to accelerate the realisation of universal access to WASH for every child in Africa.

As Africa advances its 2026 continental priorities, the Committee reiterates that universal access to safe water, sanitation and hygiene is not only a development priority but a binding human rights obligation and a protection imperative. As affirmed by the Africa Water Vision 2063, water is life, sanitation is dignity, and achieving universal access requires leaving no child behind.

Ensuring that every child, especially every girl, has access to safe, affordable, acceptable and resilient WASH services is essential to building a water-secure, gender-equal and child-centred Africa, capable of safeguarding the rights, dignity and well-being of both present and future generations in line with Africa’s long-term development and sustainability commitments.

Done in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho

22 March 2026