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**OPENNING CEREMONY of the 67th SESSION OF THE AFRICAN
COMMISSION ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS**

**BY HONORABLE LADY JUSTICE MARIA MAPANI-KAWIMBE
DEPUTY RAPPOREUR OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS
ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD**

**Hon Chairperson of the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights,
Delegates of Member States of the AU,
Representatives of Regional Economic Communities,
Representatives of National Human Rights Institutions,
Representatives of the Civil Society,
Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would first like to express my deepest gratitude, on behalf of the Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, to the African Commission for extending the invitation to the Committee to take part in the 67th Ordinary Session of the Commission. The enhanced collaboration between the Committee and the Commission is praiseworthy and we believe that it can further be strengthened. It is our Committee's belief that children's rights issues can be pushed at the continent level through collaboration and therefore the Committee would like to further enhance its collaboration with the Commission.

I would like to inform that the year 2020 marks the 30th anniversary of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. While commemorating the 30th anniversary, the Committee is trying to assess the status of the implementation of the Charter through various activities and studies with a view to accentuate priorities for the coming years. The Committee notes that there are various progresses achieved by States in the protection of children's rights. The Continent has achieved positive results in areas of child mortality, immunization of children, access to education and health services, birth registration, and child participation. However, the Committee notes the progress is not sufficient and more work needs to be

done in collaboration with various stakeholders. To this day Africa has one of the highest child and maternal mortality rates, and the lowest birth registration rate. The issue of malaria, pneumonia, diarrhea and other preventable diseases affecting children remain to be worrisome. Children's access to education and health services are hampered by high cost, long distances and child insensitive services, among others. Children of our continent also suffer from sexual exploitation, worst forms of child labor, child trafficking, and abuse and mistreatment during migration. The impact of armed conflict and hostilities on children cannot be overemphasized and has resulted in millions of children to becoming internally displaced, and separated from their parents. Despite some progress, harmful practices like child marriage and female genital mutilation (FGM) are affecting children.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The Covid-19 pandemic that has affected the world has exacerbated the abuse and neglect of children which we are trying to address in our works. Children are being disproportionately affected the by pandemic in so many various spectrums. The pandemic itself has hit so many children in spite of the perspective that children are resilient to the virus. The impact of the pandemic and the various measures taken to prevent the spread of the virus have been and are affecting children more than other population. Their access to education has been compromised with online education being not accessible to millions of children living in the rural area. Home stay measures have exposed children to heartbreaking sexual abuse mostly by family members, child marriage and FGM. It is also devastating to observe that the socio-economic impact of the pandemic has affected children in various ways as they do not have access to food, and basic health services. The

closure of schools has not only subjected children to violence, but it has also affected their mental health as they are not able to play and interact with their peers as they used to. More devastating is the fact that the mental health of children during the pandemic is one of the most neglected areas yet its impact on children is serious.

Taking these issues into consideration, the Committee has developed guiding notes to States on the measures that should be taken to mitigate the negative impact of the pandemic on children and to ensure that all measures undertaken by States are child sensitive.

Hon Chairperson,

I hereby forward the plea of the Committee for your Commission to give due regard to the issue of children's rights, particularly at this time of the Pandemic, in its undertakings during this Session including in considering the status of human rights as well as its engagement with State Parties. The Committee also looks forward to work with your Commission more than ever by looking at opportunities for collaboration. Children's rights issue are human rights issues which is at the heart of the Commission and hence areas of collaboration and broad. I would like to also inform you that our Committee will be organizing a continental workshop in the commemoration of the 30th anniversary during its Session to be held on 23 November to 04 December 2020. The Committee also wishes to collaborate with the Commission at this important milestone of the Charter.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Before I conclude, I would like to stress that the Committee is open to working with various stakeholders and is eager to increase the pool of its

stakeholders. It is through engagement and stronger collaboration that we can change the fate of our children and address the cross-cutting issues they are facing.

I thank you very much for your attention and I wish you a fruitful deliberation.