

**PRESS RELEASE NO.13/2004****PROMOTING THE AFRICAN FAMILY - EXPERTS MEET TO ADOPT A PLAN OF ACTION ON THE FAMILY IN AFRICA**

The family is the basic unit of society which plays a vital role in political, cultural and socio-economic development; and as such should be strengthened and protected. In Africa, the family plays multiple roles and functions. Among others, the main role of the family is to nurture, care for and provide assistance, support and protection to the members to allow them perform their required functions at normal times as well as during crises. The family also plays a key role in the promotion of socio-economic development. However, during the last two decades, the environment in which African families have found themselves, has progressively changed thus requiring adjustments in family structures, roles and functions. Included here are child-headed families, the increasing number of single parent families, families where the aged once again take up heading the family and families on the street or in camps. Many families have been living in hardship with no chance of improvement in their living conditions especially those in the rural areas. Changes in social structure, globalization and subsequent socio-economic pressures have had some dramatic effects on the African family. Poverty levels have increased making some families very vulnerable. Furthermore families have been disintegrated due to recurring droughts and famines, civil strifes and armed conflicts, rural-urban migration, the HIV/AIDS pandemic, globalization and other social changes.

In trying to address the above multidimensional challenges facing the family in Africa and elsewhere and to raise awareness on the family situation, the United Nations proclaimed 1994 as the International Year of the Family (IYF). Africa's response was the adoption of Resolution CM/Res.1466(LVIII) of the former OAU, urging Member States to lend priority to the preparation and observance of the IYF and establish National Coordinating Committees or similar mechanisms at national level. However, since 1994, although some achievements were made in recognizing the significant roles and functions of the family, some crucial issues were left unresolved and some gaps remained in policies for the family. In its resolution 54/124 of 1999, the UN General Assembly reaffirmed the importance: of giving a new impetus to the follow-up of the IYF and to observe its tenth anniversary.

In this regard, the Third Session of the AU Executive Council meeting in Maputo, Mozambique in July 2003 adopted Decision EX/CL/65(III) on the Tenth Anniversary of the International Year of the Family which was also endorsed by the Second Assembly of Heads of State and Government. Operative paragraph 9 of that decision “mandates the AU Commission, in collaboration with UNICEF and

other social partners, to elaborate a Plan of Action on the Family in Africa which would constitute Africa’s contribution to the Tenth Anniversary of the IYF”.

Consequently, a Draft Plan of Action was formulated and an Experts Group Meeting will be convened on 8 and 9 March, 2004 to finalise it. This meeting is being held at a most appropriate time when global efforts are being deployed to improve the living conditions and well-being of the vulnerable groups and other less fortunate segments of our society. However, we should begin with the family which is the core of our society, for, without the full and consistent involvement of the family in socio-economic development endeavours, there can be no improvement in the well-being of our peoples and thus no sustainable development.

The Plan of Action will, therefore, serve as an instrument to: strengthen the family units and ensure that their needs are addressed; improve their general welfare and enhance the life chances of family members. The Plan of Action is also to guide AU Member States in designing, implementing, monitoring and evaluating appropriate national policies and programmes for the family based on their specific requirements and needs. It is also a reminder to every individual that we are in a position to contribute to development through ensuring the survival of the African Family, whereby every orphan or person in need should have access to care and support. Everyone should therefore strive to play their role and support the African family.