

AFRICAN UNION

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PRESS RELEASE NO.33/2006

THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD - 16 JUNE, 2006

To-day 16 June 2006, the AU Commission is once again observing the Day of the African Child (DAC). The theme this year is **“Right to Protection: Stop Violence Against Children”**. This year also marks the 30th anniversary of the uprising which took place in Soweto in 1976 when a large number of innocent children were massacred.

African children are the wealth and future of our continent. In this regard, they need to be given particular care, protection, love and understanding to enable them fully develop their potential and life chances. The protection of the child against abuse, exploitation, violence, harmful traditional social and cultural practices are well articulated in the provisions of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

The trend to-day is that children remain the most vulnerable and disadvantaged group in the many social, economic and political changes taking place in the continent. Added to that an increasing number of them have become victims of violence, abuse, exploitation and maltreatment. Some of the violence is invisible or silent while some is more apparent; but whatever be the form or type, violence has severe implications on the child’s survival and development. It destroys the child’s self-confidence and undermines his/her ability to be good responsible adults or parents in the future. It can also affect the health, the potential and the ability of the child to learn and even the willingness to go to school.

On this day of non-violence against the child, the AU Commission has focused on the harmful traditional practice against girls and women, more specifically on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). This is a form of violence which has violated the human rights and dignity of girls and women for a long time.

Gravely concerned about the social and psychological effects of FGM in Africa and its impacts on the health status of girls, the AU Chairperson has issued a strong statement on the elimination of FGM, to be read by all Member States on this day of the African Child. Member States and partners have been called upon to engage and mobilize all sectors of the society to fight against this barbaric practice of FGM. They have also been requested to make a solemn commitment to eliminate that devastating cultural tradition and help the millions of children who continue to be victims of such practices. It is only through concerted efforts and struggle that we can put an end to this belief and practice.

Addis Ababa June 16, 2006