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**AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE  
OF THE CHILD**

**STATEMENT ON VIOLENCE AGAINST CHILDREN**

It is not easy to talk about violence inflicted on children without getting emotional. The outrage against the adult who beats a child and the sympathy for the defenceless child are so natural that, however much we know about human nature, we are always inclined to condemn the adult for his brutality and his cruelty.

Everywhere in the world and particularly in Africa, there are frequent reports of cases of violence committed against children, notably cases of corporal and humiliating punishments, genital mutilation of girls, negligence, sexual abuse, homicide and other forms of violence. We could also add the socio cultural pressures which very often create an amalgam between socialisation (traditional education) and violence and the tendency to cover up the cruelty of the perpetrators.

The family, the school, the community, privileged places of socialisation and education above all else are worryingly and more and more becoming stages of several scenes of violence against children committed by children, parents, teachers and guardians. Despite the challenges of data collection, studies which were undertaken by African countries following the recommendations of the Study of the United Nations Secretary General on violence against children in 2006 show the urgency to act.

Aware of the magnitude of the phenomenon, a few African countries have launched several actions and strategies in favour of the interdiction and the rapid elimination of violence against children. The measures taken include actions of prevention, protection and rehabilitation. We note amongst these actions: legislative and institutional frameworks, local and national prevention strategies and trends in the design of policies. However, these measures remain largely insufficient and need to be supported and maintained over time.

By adopting the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the Charter), African States committed themselves to the mission of protecting children against abuse and ill-treatment which constitute the key elements of violence against children.

The Charter, which is inspired by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) of the United Nations considers the wellbeing and the best interests of children as fundamental principles shared by all State parties and protects children against all forms of violence.

Violence results in severe traumas on children as well as serious and lasting psycho-traumatic consequences on their health, with repercussions on their psychomotor development, their

schooling, and their social life in the short and long term. The risk of seeing children perpetrating violence as future adults is high. Isn't it a fact that an individual abuses his child as a reflection of his own past experiences? Inevitably, battered children tend to batter others, threatened children will also threaten others, humiliated ones will humiliate, and mutilated ones tend to mutilate others. The witnessing of violence which we inflict on ourselves or which we commit on others will inevitably destroy a child's soul. But this doesn't correspond in any way to the ideal of a society that we all aspire for.

We have all made promises to these fragile, vulnerable and dependent children for their proper growth and development, and for the creation of an Africa fit for children. Increased investments have been made by families, society and States in the prevention of violence against children in the last twenty years. But we remain convinced that these measures would have had a greater success if all States had demonstrated a stronger political will in the implementation of the adopted laws and the ratified treaties. This would have given the assurance that there will never be a country in Africa, where violence towards children is tolerated.

In addition, the realisation of the goals of the Plan of Action for an Africa fit for Children constitutes a concrete action on children's protection. The Committee of Experts calls for the firm engagement of African States, at the highest level, to support the eradication of all forms of violence against children. In many countries in the continent, don't we find that society still tolerates and sometimes condones certain recurrent forms of violence against children, especially in families? However, no tradition, religion, belief, economic situation or educational method should justify these practices. Policies and programmes should address the factors of immediate risks and those that weaken society. To this end, programmes to combat poverty and ensure the reduction of inequalities should be strengthened. A clear and unambiguous rejection of all forms of violence, even moderate ones, against children should be encouraged by society as a whole. The notions deeply rooted in the social and cultural norms and traditions which accept, tolerate and indeed encourage violence, including sexist clichés, racial or ethnic discrimination, the acceptance of corporal punishment and other harmful traditional practices should be publicly condemned and eliminated. The harmful consequences that all forms of violence can have on children should be widely publicised.

The sensitisation of States on their obligations and individuals on their responsibilities regarding the condemnation and prevention of violence and the provision of assistance for child victims should also be strengthened.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child encourages the promotion of a « culture of respect for the rights of the child », based on a deep knowledge of these rights, of the vulnerability of children and their evolving abilities. The fight against the abuse and the ill treatment of children should be a widely shared concern. Widespread actions should be undertaken so as to disseminate information and advice related to the prevention, detection and elimination of abuse committed against a child, widely among children as well as adults, in addition to building the skills of professionals working with children. Children's schooling free from violence is a guarantee of continuity for our societies. Special attention should be given to this concern while drafting national budgets.

The prevention of violence requires inter-sectoral cooperation and coordination. This implies notably, a coordination of different services at the State level, and between the government and civil society, to support families in their primary responsibility to raise their children. Do families often ask themselves legitimately how to resolve the contradiction between the perception of the child as a precious being with full rights and a source of social and economic security and that of not always treating a child with sensitivity, consideration and respect in daily life? Putting in place systems for dialogue with children and fostering a culture of respect for their opinions should be a primary goal.

Finally, it is necessary to continue to incorporate the provisions of the Convention on the Rights of the Child which guarantee the best interest of the child in the domestic laws of each country, particularly in relation to the deep concerns raised with regards to corporal punishment of children and to strengthen the cooperation within the relevant government authorities, cross border networks and other international organisations.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child on its part:

- Recalls and supports the recommendation aimed at including the campaign on violence against children as a theme at the upcoming Summit of Heads of States and Governments of the African Union;
- Invites the African States which have not yet ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child to do so;

- Urges African states to continue the integration of the rights of the child in all their national policies and to ensure the rigorous and effective implementation of laws, and the putting in place of a complaint and redress mechanism for children;
- Urges the adoption by all African States of a triennial Plan of Action with specific measures aimed at eliminating violence in schools and to back these actions with appropriate financial and human resources.

The President of the Committee

Mrs KABORE/OUATTARA Agnès