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Centre for Human Rights
Faculty of Law

STATEMENT OF THE CENTRE FOR HUMAN RIGHTS AT THE 33RD ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD

18 March 2019, Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

Honourable Chairperson, Honourable Members, the Centre for Human Rights of the University of Pretoria is grateful for the opportunity to address you on this occasion: the opening of the 33rd Ordinary Session of the Committee.

Mme Chairperson, we take this opportunity to convey our heartfelt condolences to the Committee, and to the family of the Honourable Mohammed H'Meyada on his passing.

We also join fellow participants at this Session to welcome the new Member of the Committee, Honourable Ms Hermine Gatsing Kembo.

Mme Chair, Honourable members;

The Centre continues to work towards the advancement of the rights of children on the continent through the implementation of the African Children's Charter.

Through our engagement in various countries in the past year, we have noted a particular issue of concern to us, and which we would wish to call the attention of the Committee to.

We are deeply concerned about the plight of **children accused of witchcraft** across the continent. Children accused of witchcraft suffer severe consequences - abandonment, social marginalisation, denial of healthcare and other basic services, physical and psychological violence, up to the point of killing children, in some instances. Our research shows that such accusations are carried out by family members, neighbours, their communities and churches.

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The Centre urges the African Children's Committee to prioritise this issue and to expedite processes leading to the protection of these children's rights. We, in collaboration with one of our partners, are preparing a communication on this matter to be submitted to you in the near future.

Honourable Members,

The Centre has planned a number of initiatives for the advancement of child rights in 2019, some of which we wish to highlight here.

Firstly, the Centre has embarked on a process of preparing a **documentary film** premised on the Talibé case, which was submitted to this Committee in 2012 by the Centre in collaboration with the Senegalese NGO Rencontre Africaine pour la Défence des Droits de l'Homme (RADDHO). The aims of the documentary are;

- (i) to highlight the violations of the Talibé children's rights;
- (ii) to showcase issues in the implementation of the decisions of the AU human rights organs,
- (iii) to present challenges faced by the Government of Senegal in fully implementing the decision; and
- (iv) and to provide information about the process of submitting a complaint before the African Children's Committee.

The documentary will serve as an advocacy tool for NGOs, for use across different platforms, and also guide African governments on what is necessary to implement the decisions of the Committee. We intend to have the documentary ready by November 2019, in time for the 34th Session of the Committee.

Secondly, the Centre runs a **yearly campaign on a selected theme every** year. In 2019, the Centre's campaign will focus on the rights of migrant and internally displaced people in Africa, paying particular attention to women and children as the most vulnerable groups. It is not in dispute that the plight of migrants, displaced persons and refugees is one of the major crisis currently facing the African continent. The scope of the campaign is aligned with Aspiration 4 of Agenda 2063 and also coincides with the African Union's theme for 2019, that is, 'The Year of Refugees, Returnees and Internally Displaces Persons: Towards durable solutions to forced displacement in Africa'. Some of the key highlights of the campaign will include a high level lecture on the topic of migration and displacement; documentaries, documentation of stories of migrants from various African countries, and their social and economic contribution to the betterment of the country in which they take refuge. We hope that the campaign will contribute to the reduction of Afro-phobia, xenophobia, and other forms of hatred that is targeted at migrants, displaced persons and refugees.

Closely related to the above is the forthcoming **African Human Rights Moot Court Competition**, which the Centre will host from 1 – 6 July 2019 in Gaborone Botswana. As we mentioned at the last Session in November, the topic of the Competition in 2019 corresponds with the AU theme for the year, and will include a one-day Conference on the same subject. We look forward to host the representatives of the Committee at the Competition and the Conference.

Fourthly, the Centre has begun the process of developing a **child-friendly version of the African Children's Charter** as well as a theoretical framework that will enable stakeholders to assess the child-friendliness of a publication. The primary aim of this initiative is to facilitate dissemination of the Charter to children in order to enable them to meaningfully participate and demand accountability for the implementation of their rights. We are guided in this regard by the conviction that children are not only beneficiaries of rights but also rights holders; and that child participation is closely interrelated to children's right to access age appropriate information.

Finally, we would wish to bring to the attention of the Committee an upcoming **dissemination workshop** for a study on the implementation of children's rights in 5 African countries that is Chad, Egypt, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa. The workshop will provide a forum for exchange of lessons and experiences on what works in the implementation of children's rights. The workshop will be held at the end of April.

Honourable Chair,

The Centre appreciates the partnership we have with the Committee, and reiterates its commitment to continue our support to your work.

We thank you for the opportunity to address you on this occasion, and wish you fruitful deliberations for the rest of the Session.

We thank you.