



UNIVERSITEIT VAN PRETORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF PRETORIA  
YUNIBESITHI YA PRETORIA

Centre for Human Rights  
Faculty of Law

## PRESS STATEMENT

### STATEMENT ON THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD: MORE IS NEEDED TO ACHIEVE AN AFRICA FIT FOR CHILDREN BY 2040

16 June 2021

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#### **Background**

On 16 June every year, the African continent celebrates the Day of the African Child (DAC). The African Union (AU) designated this Day to commemorate the contributions of the children and young people to the liberation of South Africa from apartheid, exemplified by many of them being shot during protest action on this day in 1976. In the years since its establishment, the DAC has been used to highlight pertinent issues affecting the rights and welfare of children in Africa, and to remind African countries of their promise and commitments to protect the rights of children in Africa.

The choice of each year's theme is made by the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the Committee). The Committee monitors the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (African Children's Charter). The African Children's Charter is the AU treaty dealing with the rights of children. It has been ratified by 50 AU member states. The Democratic Republic of Congo became the last state to do so, in 2020.

The Centre for Human Rights (Centre) joins the rest of the African continent in commemorating the DAC 2021 under the theme of '30 years after the adoption of the Charter: accelerate the implementation of Agenda 2040 for an Africa fit for children'. This year's theme allows for reflection on the successes and challenges in the implementation of the Agenda, and provides an opportunity for renewing commitments to the realization of its goals.

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## ***Agenda 2040***

The Agenda consists of ten aspirations which embody priorities that the Committee considers critical to strengthening the protection of the rights and welfare of children in Africa over the next 20 years. These aspirations include the pursuit of child-friendly national legal, policy and institutional frameworks; the goal of full birth registration and other vital statistics of children; guarantees for the survival of all children; guarantees of nutrition and access to the basic necessities of life; access to quality education; access to a child-sensitive criminal justice system; protection from violence, exploitation, neglect; protection from the impacts of conflict and other emergencies; and respect for the views of children. Collectively, they represent the most impactful aspects of children's existence on the African continent.

To states that have ratified the African Children's Charter, Agenda 2040 acts as an impetus for renewed action to get states to fully recognise – in theory and practice – the rights of their children. For states that have not become a party to the African Children's Charter, Agenda 2040 provides a normative compass towards making children's rights real.

In 2020, the Committee instituted an assessment of the progress made during the first five years of the implementation of the Agenda. The findings of the assessment noted some progress on some of the aspirations, but also disparities in the pace of implementation from one aspiration to the other, and from one country to another. Of particular concern was the general ignorance of the existence of the Agenda, and hence a failure to take it into account in national level child rights implementation plans.

The assessment further noted that the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted on prioritisation and funding of key services and programmes related to the aspirations of the Agenda, had compounded the challenges experienced by African states in implementing the Agenda. For instance, the COVID-19 pandemic has greatly disrupted access to essential services for children, such as healthcare, education, protection services, feeding programmes for the most vulnerable, and birth registration.

## ***Not enough***

The findings of the assessment, as well as the evolving impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, underscore the need to evaluate the efforts towards full implementation of the Agenda. The potential of the Agenda to clarify, harmonise, prioritise, and rally collective action for child rights implementation in the African region cannot be overstated. It is nevertheless evident from the assessment by the Committee that there is a credible risk that this potential may never be fully harnessed.

The full realisation of the vision of an Africa fit for children, as envisaged under the Agenda, will require the input of far more than governments. Nevertheless, the leadership of governments is the

indispensable component of the implementation process. Accordingly, at this critical juncture, which is the start of the second phase of its implementation, the Centre calls on African countries to renew their commitment and sense of urgency for the implementation of the Agenda.

In particular, the Centre:

- calls on African countries to adopt national action plans for the implementation of the Agenda;
- calls on AU member states who are yet to ratify the African Children's Charter to ratify it as soon as possible; and
- urges states parties to the African Children's Charter to adopt innovative ways, such as the use of technology, to accelerate achievement of milestones under each of the aspirations.

May the celebration of this Day of the African Child in 2021 bring us closer to the dream of an Africa fit for children.

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