



The Charter: Leaving No Child Behind Ending Violence Against Children in Africa

Adopted on 21 August 2019 on the occasion of “The African Regional Child Trauma Conference”

STATEMENT OF URGENCY

Projections of world populations indicate that by the year 2050, 40% of the world's births will occur on the African continent. This means that Africa will be home to 37% of the world's children. By the end of the 21st century, 40% of the world's population will live on the African continent (UNICEF 2014). Currently, African households have the highest child dependency ratio in the world. Life expectancy for African children has risen but is still shorter than the global average. Three in ten of Africa's children are currently living in fragile and conflict affected environments (UNICEF 2014), and this has a major influence on the violence against children and the continent.

The predictions for the quality of life for Africa's future are far from ideal. Policy interventions and implementation can still help create a better future and now is the time to effect the changes that will ensure a safer environment for Africa's children. No child should be left behind.

As actors in the field of preventing and responding to violence against children from the African continent gather in Cape Town in South Africa for the African Regional Child Trauma Conference, and recognising critical challenges of realising the Sustainable Development Goals, we recognise the significance of this time by:

CONSIDERING that the Constitution Act of the African Union recognizes the paramount importance of the promotion and protection of human and peoples' rights in accordance with the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights,

BEING CONSCIOUS that the African Charter on Human and People's Rights proclaimed and agreed that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms recognized and guaranteed therein, without distinction of any kind such as age, race, ethnic group, colour, sex, language, religion, political or any other opinion, national and social origin, fortune, birth or other status,

RECALLING that the African Charter and the Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the Child recognise and reiterate the need to promote and uphold the best interest principle in all matters that affect children. At all times in all areas, to protect the rights and welfare of African child, including those that are affected by conflict, tension or strife.

BEING COGNISANT that the African Union adopted Agenda 2063 as a strategic development framework that aims to deliver on inclusive and sustainable development through the recognition of the need to have an Africa whose development is people-driven, relying on the potential offered by the African people, especially its women, youth, and caring for children. In addition, that the African Committee on the Rights and Welfare of the Child has adopted Agenda 2040 which focuses on children and youth as the drivers of Africa's Renaissance, and embraces the Sustainable Development Goals.

FURTHER RECOGNISING that Agenda 2063 identifies that the Sustainable Development Goals can be harnessed by human rights bodies to promote and protect the rights of the children,

NOTING WITH CONCERN that the situation of most African children remains critical due to the unique factors of their socio-economic and developmental circumstances, natural disasters, armed conflicts, exploitation and hunger, and that as children they need special safeguards and care,

RECOGNISING that children occupy a unique and privileged position in African societies and that for the full and harmonious development of their personalities, children should grow up in an environment of happiness, love and understanding,

RECOGNISING that children require particular care with regards to health, physical, mental, moral and social development and are entitled to legal and political protection in conditions of freedom, dignity and security,

TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION the virtues of the cultural heritage, historical background and the values of the African civilisation and traditions which should inspire and characterise the rights and welfare of children,

CONSIDERING that the promotion and protection of the rights and welfare of children also implies the performance of duties on the part of everyone,

REAFFIRMING ADHERENCE to the principles of the rights and welfare of the child contained in the declaration, treaties, conventions and other instruments of the African Union and the United Nations, and in particular the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child; and the OAU Heads of State and Government's Declaration on the Rights and Welfare of the African Child.

PATHWAYS

We the signatories of the charter, '*The Leaving No Child Behind: Ending Violence Against Children in Africa Charter*', call upon inter-country regional networks, national, sub-national and local governments and non-state actors to upscale action that will accelerate efforts towards ending violence/trauma against African children by committing to the following:

1) Preventing violence against children in Africa by going back to our roots

Addressing the interwoven issues of poverty, deprivation, abandonment of babies, violence in homes, schools and communities, hunger and malnutrition, substance abuse, and a host of other issues that lead to trauma in the lives of children and adults. Specifically, we call for expansion of parenting programmes that include the involvement of fathers, social mobilisation across religious, traditional and educational institutions and youth communities, and early interventions packages for child care services. Reinforcing and rebuilding the ethos of UBUNTU in order to emphasise collective responsibility for children remains an essential component of prevention. Prevention needs to start at the perinatal level and should incorporate relational support for all.

2) Preventing and responding to the many faces of intergenerational trauma in Africa:

Breaking the cycle of intergenerational trauma involves recognising and addressing each generation's traumatic experiences. Traumatic experiences range from gang violence to war, systemic abuse and exploitation, community trauma and person-centred trauma. Treatment and research should be prioritised to increase the understanding of these phenomena and to generate effective response mechanisms. Perinatal and child services around the mother-father-infant triad are critical and need to be redesigned.

3) Promoting positive discipline as a strategy and lobbying for the elimination of corporal punishment in Africa:

A key factor in supporting vulnerable children is building positive relationships – between children and caregivers, between families and childcare institutions, between all sectors providing services and between institutions and law makers. Positive relationships are informed by positive discipline to help children solve problems, manage conflict and mediation without resorting to violence. Efforts should be made to internalise positive discipline practises by caregivers, and harsh corporal punishment should no longer have a place in homes, schools or other child environments.

4) Regulating the online environment and educating children and their caretakers in online rights and responsibilities

The online environment and how it is used by children needs to be regulated by legislative and non-legislative measures. Children and their caretakers have the right to be equipped with knowledge and tools for making online environments safer so that they can respond when they encounter

inappropriate and dangerous content and contacts in order to prevent unhealthy conduct and exploitation. Laws should not only be clear, but also have the mandate and resources to act swiftly and effectively.

5) Preventing and dealing with the disadvantages associated with poverty and the layers of exploitation of children

Break the cycle of vulnerability by providing access to a holistic suite of sustainable support services which underpin the basic rights of children and families. Paying particular attention to the vulnerabilities that poverty creates such as child exploitation and labour. Reframing our current view on the experiences of poverty-stricken young people within their context and creating empowering opportunities to enable them to become active and citizens.

6) Preventing the involvement of African children in armed conflict: including war and gang violence

There is alarming evidence of the trauma inflicted on children in armed conflict. This is seen in the recruitment of children to fight or support armed groups, killing or maiming of children, attacks on schools or hospitals, abduction, and sexual and psychological violence. Children who are both victims and/or compelled into perpetrating violence need help to deal with their traumatic experiences. Timely provision of basic documentation is required for children on the move to access the resources and services that fast track their homogenisation into society.

7) Prioritising the protection of children marginalised by disabilities

Educate communities to reduce the stigma of disability and champion the inclusion of children with disabilities to participate in all aspects of society. Prioritise access to justice through applying immediate procedural accommodation within all components of the justice system. Providing structures to support and educate families with children with disabilities in order to enable these children to reach their best potential.

8) Providing appropriate responses to children affected by all forms of sexual violence, including interventions for children, families and communities

Sexual violence against children is widespread and this impacts on the health, psychological wellbeing and future relationships of children. Children are abused and exploited by adults as well as other children. This abuse may be direct or indirect and children remain particularly vulnerable to suffer sexual exploitation, such as slavery, forced and early marriages and pregnancies, rape and compelled prostitution. Growing evidence shows the extent of boys experiencing sexual abuse, but the lack of response services and cultural norms silence these experiences, which render the abuse invisible. Rape culture and the socially sanctioned deviance of sport and boundary blurring needs to be debunked. Children should be given the vocabulary and mechanisms to recognise and report the abuse.

9) Providing multi-faceted approaches to dealing with children in conflict with the law

By creating safe and nurturing environments for children we will reduce the risk of children in conflict with the law. To realise a reduction in crime committed by children and youth, prevention is recognised as a strategy to avoid children coming into conflict with the law rather than intervening when it is too late. When intervention is the only available option, holistic approaches inclusive of evidence-based diversion programmes should be implemented. It should be ensured that child recipients of an intervention are not placed back into an unchanged environment.

10) Developing strategies for coordinating and integrating interventions and knowledge for preventing and responding to child trauma

Preventing and responding to violence against children requires trans-sectoral collaboration. All stakeholders of regional networks, government, civil society and communities need to co-ordinate efforts and share resources to ensure effective service delivery to children. Professionals from all disciplines should collaborate in ensuring integrated and coherent strategies and programmes. Access to psychological support, well-ness programmes, and self-care are essential for professionals at risk of secondary trauma. A clearing house for evidence-based programmes that have relevance in African contexts is required to enable the sharing and dissemination of knowledge and best practice.

We the signatories of the charter, '**Leaving No Child Behind - Ending Violence Against Children in Africa**' present this Charter to the heads of State of the African Union and United Nations General Assembly and Secretary General by way of elevating the rights of the African child in the global discourse.

Name:.....

Designation:

Representing (organisation):.....

Country:

Email:

Signature.....