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STATEMENT BY H.E. AMIRA ELFADIL AT THE CONSULTATION ON CHILD LABOUR AND FORCED LABOUR IN SUB SAHARAN AFRICA IN VIEW OF THE IV GLOBAL CONFERENCE, ARGENTINA, NOVEMBER 2017

ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA, 22-23 JUNE 2017

Distinguished Regional Director of the International Labour Organisation,
Esteemed representatives of Member States

Dear Social Partners,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure to speak at this important gathering on behalf of Dr. Amira Elfadil, Commissioner for Social Affairs, who would be more than delighted to personally address the meeting, but could not be here due to other engagements.

The issues of child labour and forced labour are of great concern to African leaders who committed in Agenda 2063 to eliminate all forms of child labour in the continent. As one of the cardinal principles of the child protection system, the principle of the 'best interest of the child' is the fundamental guidance to their efforts.

Records indicate that 1 out of 5 children of 5-17 ages in Africa are engaged in one form or another in child labour. They amount to the unacceptable number of 59 million. This is the highest incidence of child labour in the world.

In line with commitments that have been made globally and regionally towards ending child labour, various African countries have adopted National Action Plans for the elimination of child labour. However, despite these efforts and the global decline in child labour, it is unfortunate to witness that most of the countries with worst child labour practices are still in Africa; and

it is more disturbing to note that most of these children involved in child labour are not paid for their work.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

We can easily agree on how important the challenge of child labour is and on the priority to be given to all actions aiming at its eradication over the next ten years, further consolidating global efforts to accelerate the pace of the elimination of child labour and forced labour.

These unacceptable forms of work result in economic losses and contribute to poverty on the continent. The situation can be, and is often worsened in the context of migration, conflict and human trafficking.

We recognize that child labour is fuelled by various interlinked factors such as poverty, inequality, limited access to quality education and vocational skill training, social protection deficit, conflict, natural disaster and migration; in particular irregular migration. The participation of children in child labour is a volatile issue, continuously reacting to changing market and social conditions.

Therefore, it is important to note that, the response given to child labour should be informed by the multiplicity and interrelatedness of the causes. This means, in addition to fighting poverty, we need to integrate respect for labour standards, universal education and social protection mechanisms to see an accelerated reduction of child labour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The establishment of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which clearly addresses the issue of child labour, is a strong indication of the commitments that African leaders are ready to undertake. The Charter defines a child as every human being below the age of 18 years. Article 15 of the Charter is dedicated to Child labour and states: '*Every child shall be protected from all forms of economic exploitation and from performing any work that is likely to be hazardous or to interfere with the child's physical, mental, spiritual, moral, or social development.*' This provision binds all 47 African States that have ratified the Charter.

Despite these provisions, the current pace of progress on the issue is not encouraging; we need to take a significant leap forward to achieve our target. The AU pledges for a regional initiative in collaboration with the ILO as well as involving other key development partners such as the UNICEF, to eliminate child labour in the continent by 2025.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The African Union will engage in a cycle of 2 successive five years comprehensive action plans for child labour elimination, encompassing measures based on the Charter as pertaining to: protection of the family; parent care and protection; parental responsibilities. Furthermore, the action plan will address the needs of vulnerable children such as refugee children,

children of imprisoned mothers and victims of sexual exploitation. Additionally, special attention will be given to sectors and areas with high concentration of child labourers such as agriculture, informal economy, domestic work and mining.

Ladies and gentlemen.

Alliance 8.7, as a global initiative to fight against child labour, modern slavery, human trafficking and forced labour, creates a favourable platform for collaboration and coordination of various initiatives within Africa. The four goals of Alliance 8.7 strongly demand increased collaboration. These goals consolidate and target our efforts towards eliminating child labour by 2025. Furthermore, the conclusions of the meeting in Abidjan in 2016 can be used as a guide to the building of an effective engagement in Africa.

The African Union will bring its competences on policy and standards setting, advocacy, monitoring and evaluation with knowledge sharing. In this regards, I wish to underline the key roles of the pan African Parliament on related legislative work, the ECOSOCC as well as the concerned specialized technical committees in charge of child, women, labour, agriculture, trade and industry, peace and security, education, etc.

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, which has the necessary investigation capacities, is of paramount importance in guiding member states on child protection issues, thereby playing a significant role in the fight against child labour.

By creating and strengthening collaboration through forging a stronger partnership with member states, private sector and international partners such as the ILO and tapping in to the high potential of the aforementioned institutions and the competencies of the AUC, synergy and complementarity can be built, with the ultimate goal of eradicating the worst forms of child labour over the next ten years through two five year action plans. This partnership will lead to innovative intervention models to accelerate the pace of the elimination of child labour.

Ladies and gentlemen,

At this juncture, the African Union Commission would like to acknowledge the leading role of the ILO in bringing together the relevant UN Agencies under the same roof to achieve target 8.7 of the UN Agenda 2030, thereby encompassing the objective and targets of the AU Agenda 2063 regarding elimination of all forms of child labour in the continent.

The Commission looks forward to receiving the conclusions of the meeting, and participating as an active player in the global partnership aiming at eradicating child labour and forced labour, focusing on the worst forms of child labour. The Commission will lend its support to take the conclusions and the prospects of partnership to the Global Conference in Argentina.

I wish you success in in your deliberations.

Thank you for your kind attention.