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**REPORT OF THE 4TH CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR CIVIL REGISTRATION,
4 – 8 DECEMBER 2017, NOUAKCHOTT, MAURITANIA**

REPORT OF THE 4TH CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE FOR CIVIL REGISTRATION, 4 – 8 DECEMBER 2017, NOUAKCHOTT, MAURITANIA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. The Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration was held in Nouakchott, Mauritania, from 4 to 8 December 2017. The Ministers' meeting was preceded by a 3 day Expert Group meeting held from 4-6 December 2017. The conference was organized as per the Decision of the **Assembly/AU/Dec.424 (XIX)** of the African Union Assembly of Heads of State and Government, held in July 2012 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, that endorsed the institutionalization of a biennial meeting of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration within the framework of a relevant Specialized Technical Committee of the African Union for discussion and evaluation of political and policy issues related to Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) in Africa. The Conference was held under the auspices of African Union Commission (AUC) with the support of the African Development Bank (AfDB) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (ECA).

2. The meeting was attended by representatives of the following member States: Algeria, Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Cabo Verde, Central African Republic, Chad, the Comoros, Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Djibouti, Egypt, Equatorial Guinea, Ethiopia, Gabon, the Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Kenya, Lesotho, Liberia, Libya, Madagascar, Malawi, Mali, Mauritania, Mauritius, Morocco, Mozambique, Namibia, the Niger, Nigeria, Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, Sao Tome and Principe, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Somalia, South Africa, South Sudan, the Sudan, Swaziland, Togo, Tunisia, Uganda, United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

II. BUREAU

3. The Bureau of the meetings was elected as follows:

Chair:	North Africa – Mauritania
First Vice-Chair:	Southern Africa – Zambia
Second Vice-Chair:	East Africa – Sudan
Third Vice- Chair:	Central Africa – Gabon
Deputy Rapporteur:	West Africa – Cote d'Ivoire

III. THEME, OBJECTIVE AND OUTCOME DOCUMENTS OF THE CONFERENCE

4. The Conference was held under the theme "***Accelerating a coordinated improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) for implementation and monitoring development in Africa: Review of progress and the way forward***". The opening session was followed by 3 main sessions that focused on,

- a) Civil registration and vital statistics: an imperative for the implementation of Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development;

- b) Reviewing progress of the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems (APAI-CRVS);
- c) Towards the accelerated improvement in civil registration and vital statistics systems in African countries: issues and challenges in their implementation.

5. The overall objective of the conference was to contextualize the Africa Programme on Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Systems APAI-CRVS against Agenda 2063 and 2030 Agenda and to identify key challenges in the implementation of the programme and propose solutions. The outcome documents of the meeting included the Report of the meeting of Experts, the Report of the meeting of Ministers and the Nouakchott Declaration.

6. In line with the deliberation the conference proposed the Ministerial Report and Nouakchott Declaration for the consideration and adoption by the Executive Council.

IV. PRESENTATION OF THE DRAFT CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FROM THE MEETING OF EXPERTS

7. The meeting took note of the report of the meeting of experts. In considering the report, Ministers made the following recommendations.

Civil registration and vital statistics: an imperative for the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Agenda 2063

8. The meeting made the following recommendations

- a) Put in place, together with regional economic communities, clear mandates and accountability frameworks for CRVS systems at each administrative level;
- b) Allocate adequate funding for CRVS in order to ensure the functioning of CRVS systems;
- c) Adopt the new international Medical Certificate of Cause of Death form, designed by WHO, as an entry point;
- d) Train physicians and other health workers, with the support of WHO and partners, to use the Medical Certificate of Cause of Death form for health facility and verbal autopsy for community deaths, and monitor implementation, including with respect to electronic reporting, based on interoperability;
- e) Provide incentives to facilitate death registration and the collection of data on cause of death, such as burial permits, insurance and performance-based indicators, at health facilities and in communities;
- f) Promote and strengthen the sharing of good practices among African countries in the spirit of South-South cooperation;

- g) Make effective use of African institutions of research and higher learning, such as INDEPTH.

Birth registration as an opportunity to integrate civil registration and identity management systems

9. The meeting made the following recommendation

- a) Encourages member States to create a unified system for civil registration and civil identification operations.

Civil registration and vital statistics and population movement

10. The meeting made the following recommendations

- a) Requests member States to review and, as necessary, reform national civil registration legislation to ensure that all persons, regardless of their origin, legal status, religion, or nationality can have their life events recorded at the place of occurrence;
- b) Requests member States to take special measures to include data on refugees, internally displaced persons, persons at risk of statelessness and stateless persons in CRVS system assessments, improvement strategies and scaling up plans, including specific baselines and targets;
- c) Requests member States to put in place effective and inclusive CRVS systems that are flexible and responsive to the situation of forcibly displaced populations and those at risk of statelessness;
- d) Encourages greater coordination and facilitate the appropriate sharing of data between government departments and relevant stakeholders, including UNHCR.

Report on the status of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa: outcome of the APAI-CRVS monitoring

11. The meeting made the following recommendations:

- a) Revises the questionnaire so that the focus is on historic perspectives that determine the changes which have occurred over the years, especially after 2010, when the APAI-CRVS programme became effective;
- b) Drafts a monitoring and evaluation report that measures the performance of the APAI-CRVS programme and to ensure that the resulting assessment is included in the report;
- c) Requests that pan-African institutions develop a resource mobilization strategy and that they take the lead in raising additional resources for CRVS.

APAI-CRVS strategic plan for the period 2017-2021

12. The meeting made the following recommendations:

- a) Requests AUC, in collaboration with ECA and AfDB, to set up mechanisms for resourcing the APAI-CRVS initiative for the first half of the decade, as laid out in the strategic plan, in line with AfDB work, which had established a fund for the International Comparison Programme;
- b) Requests future revisions of the strategic plan to incorporate direct support for countries involved in CRVS improvement processes.

Moving from plan to implementation

13. The meeting made the following recommendations:

- a) Ensures government ownership for the implementation of CRVS strategic plans;
- b) Requests member States to ensure the interoperability of systems relevant to civil registration, to health, and to other sectors, paying particular attention to the confidentiality of personal data;
- c) Encourages member States to promote the use of information and communication technologies to improve CRVS systems;
- d) Requests member States to develop a robust monitoring and evaluation system;
- e) Requests that member States enhance the use of mobile registration teams with the aim of improving CRVS systems and reaching remote populations, and also requests that member States create mobile teams for nomadic populations.

Improving mortality statistics and cause of death recording and its linkages to CRVS systems in Africa

14. The meeting made the following recommendations:

- a) Encourages member States to strengthen capacity-building of health workers and the CRVS system for notification and recording of deaths and causes of death;
- b) Encourages member States to develop and implement innovative and cost-effective methods for notifying and registering vital events with a view to increasing coverage and improving accuracy of data.

Innovation and civil registration and vital statistics digitization

15. The meeting made the following recommendations:

- a) Encourages Member States to scale up the use of the CRVS Digitisation Guidebook across Africa, including the training of local personnel to improve the applicability and effectiveness of information communication technology solutions for CRVS systems;
- b) Creates an expert review group to ensure that Open CRVS is developed to fit the CRVS needs of all African countries;
- c) Creates an Africa-wide common policy on privacy and data protection, similar to that in Europe or the United States of America;
- d) Creates a game-changing technology strategy that will benefit all Africans (an ambitious objective, given that it promises to become most populous continent in the next 60 years).

Global Financing Facility in support of Every Woman, Every Child and World Bank support for civil registration and vital statistics in Africa

16. The meeting made the following recommendations:

- a) Ensures a strong level of advocacy for increased financing and allocation of national budget for CRVS systems, and leveraging and harmonizing financial support available through several development partners, to redress the current problem of limited financing for CRVS;
- b) Encourages member States to advocate for increased financial and technical assistance for strengthening CRVS from different sources (for example, national budgets and aligned support from development partners) for various activities prioritized at country level, including facilitating the integration and digitization of CRVS systems;
- c) Requests member States to strengthen coordination among stakeholders who are providing support for CRVS;
- d) Requests AUC, ECA and AfDB to take the lead in coordinating the financing and support to CRVS, consistent with the objectives of APAI-CRVS.

Vital statistics from civil registration

17. The meeting made the following recommendations:

- a) Requests member States to implement capacity-building mechanisms designed to enhance the skills and deepen the knowledge of staff members responsible for the annual vital statistics report;
- b) Requests member States to integrate their techniques used for annual CRVS into their national strategies for the development of statistics;
- c) Encourages member States to compile annual vital statistics, irrespective of the level of coverage and completeness of the vital registration process;

- d) Encourages member States to incorporate CRVS in development plans and government programmes;
- e) Encourages universities and training centres to incorporate curricula on CRVS.

Civil registration in the context of conflict and emergencies

18. The meeting made the following recommendations:

- a) Requests the APAI-CRVS secretariat to develop practical guidelines that address different types of emergencies with standard operating procedures, to include both humanitarian and development contexts in order to protect personnel working on CRVS systems, and to protect, maintain and restore civil registration services and records;
- b) Request member States to improve both the low rate of registration of deaths in emergencies and the recording of causes of death in such situations;
- c) Encourages member States to promote the need for cultural understanding and sensitivity by host countries when registering refugees and stateless persons;
- d) Requests pan-African institutions to create forums for exchanging experiences among countries on functional civil registration in emergency and other similar situations;
- e) Requests member States to conduct in-depth analyses on early marriage trends affecting displaced underage girls;
- f) Transforms the civil registration and civil identification centres into protected areas during armed conflicts, in order to shield the centres from the warring parties.

Setting up the Commission of Registrars General

19. The meeting made the following recommendation

- a) The Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration recommended the creation of a subcommittee on civil registration, under the relevant Specialized Technical Committee of the African Union, based on the Commission rules and regulations.

Leveraging partnerships in civil registration and vital statistics systems improvement initiatives

20. The meeting made the following recommendations

- a) Establishes a trust and retention fund for the APAI-CRVS initiative;

- b) Puts in place capacity-building initiatives for efficient civil registration systems and in order to obtain better quality statistics;
- c) Ensures effective coordination at national and regional levels with development partners, government officials and pan-African institutions;
- d) Builds the capacity of health and CRVS systems to improve their effectiveness and reliability;
- e) Promotes strong partnerships between ministries of telecommunication, health and civil registration in order to help in the collection and processing of data;
- f) Proposes the organization of a workshop at Nouakchott in 2018 to build the capacity of member States on civil registration and vital statistics, under the leadership of AUC, in collaboration with ECA, AfDB and other partners.

Session V: Consideration and adoption of the Ministerial declaration

21. The Ministerial declaration (attached) was adopted with amendments.

V. Any other Business

22. The conference accepted the proposal made by the Republic of Zambia to host the 5th conference of African Ministers responsible for civil registration in Lusaka, Zambia.

VI. Closing of the conference

23. Vote of thanks was read by the Minister of Namibia on behalf of the Ministers, AUC delegates and partners. The Chairperson of the Bureau and the Commissioner of Economic Affairs also made closing remarks.

**FOURTH CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS
RESPONSIBLE FOR CIVIL REGISTRATION
NOUAKCHOTT DECLARATION**

The Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration and Ministers of Health held in Nouakchott from 7 to 8 December 2017, on the theme, “Accelerating a coordinated improvement of civil registration and vital statistics for implementation and monitoring of the development agenda in Africa: Review of progress and the way forward.”

Preamble

1. *Expressing* the strong commitment on the institutionalization of the Conference of African Ministers as a standing forum of the African Union Commission as approved during the nineteenth ordinary session of the Assembly of Heads of State and Government of the African Union, held in Addis Ababa in July 2012;
2. *Considering* the fact that, in July 2016, the Heads of State and Government declared 2017-2026 to be the “Decade for repositioning civil registration and vital statistics in Africa’s continental, regional and national development agendas”;
3. *Recognizing* the role of the Africa Programme for Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) secretariat as one of the mechanisms for promoting systematic and coordinated approaches and partnerships at the regional level in the implementation of improvement initiatives concerning civil registration and vital statistics in the continent;
4. *Recognizing* the contribution of the Regional Core Group in supporting civil registration and vital statistics activities in the continent;
5. *Acknowledging* the efforts to support the African Union member States in conducting comprehensive assessments of civil registration and vital statistics systems and the development of strategic improvement plans and business mapping;
6. *Recognizing* the improvement in statistical methods relating to death registration and mortality through strategies for strengthening vital statistics in national civil registration and vital statistics plans, with a focus on mortality and cause of death statistics, which are urgently needed to inform public health decision-making and monitor progress towards national and international health goals;
7. *Welcoming* the entry into force of the digitization of civil registration and vital statistics systems, which brings the potential to provide transformative improvements in such systems, based on its ability to extend registration coverage, standardize and streamline relevant processes, integrate data from multiple systems, and securely store data at scale — all in a cost-effective way;

8. *Noting* with satisfaction the entry into force of the production of vital statistics by some African Union member States from civil registration records;
9. *Recalling* all the recommendations of previous Ministerial Conferences, including the framework to “develop results-based monitoring and evaluation systems and tools to monitor and report on progress on civil registration and vital statistics”;
10. *Recognizing* that the analysis of the business processes of the civil registration and vital statistics systems is a means of improving them, in order to have comparable and relevant vital statistics in Africa;
11. *Appreciating* the increased and continuing involvement of African Ministers of Health in improving the processes relating to the registration of births and deaths, including the collection of information on cause of death;
12. *Underscoring* the important role of the health sector in the delivery of civil registration services to ensure a coordinated and integrated approach in addressing the challenges of improving civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa and achieving universal registration of vital events;
13. *Building on* the resolutions and declarations of all previous Conferences of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration and *noting* Africa’s contribution to the development of the global agenda on civil registration and vital statistics.

The Conference,

1. *Reaffirms* the commitment of African Union member States in addressing civil registration and vital statistics issues within the context of the African Union Agenda 2063 and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, paying particular attention to the demographic dividend and population movement, and *supports* the development of guidelines and recommendations in the use of civil registration and vital statistics for harnessing developmental potentials;
2. *Reiterates* the obligation of African Union member States to improve mortality statistics and the recording of causes of death and the linkages between the health sector and civil registration and vital statistics systems in Africa, and *requests* the Ministries of Health to collaborate closely with ministries responsible for civil registration and vital statistics systems, with a view to promoting the reliability of health statistics;
3. *Welcomes* the outcome of the APAI-CRVS monitoring exercise, as indicated in the report on the status of civil registration and vital statistics in Africa;
4. *Requests* that the APAI-CRVS systems strategic plan for the period 2017-2021 is implemented with appropriate support from African Union member States and partners;

5. *Reaffirms* the need for a subcommittee responsible for civil registration and vital statistics under the relevant Specialized Technical Committee of the African Union, in accordance with the existing Rules and Regulations;
6. *Encourages* the African Union Commission to identify best practices within or outside the continent in order to improve the civil registration and vital statistics processes and methods and to share them among African Union member States and the regional economic communities;
7. *Requests* the African Union Commission, in collaboration with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania, and partners, including the Economic Commission for Africa, African Development Bank, to make necessary arrangements for the organization of the workshop entitled, “African Union Building Capacity Workshop on CRVS” in 2018 in Nouakchott;
8. *Requests* the African Union member States to implement the decision to allocate 0.15% of the national budget to promote effective statistical systems in Africa, including civil registration and vital statistics systems;
9. *Requests* the African Union to engage in and commit resources to capacity-building of the functional areas relevant to civil registration and vital statistics within the Department of Economic Affairs of the African Union Commission;
10. *Encourages* the Economic Commission for Africa to improve the staffing of the secretariat of the Africa Programme for the Accelerated Improvement of Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (APAI-CRVS) in order to enhance its technical capacity;
11. *Calls upon* African Union member States and all African development partners, including the Economic Commission for Africa and the African Development Bank, to build the institutional capacity of all African actors involved in civil registration and vital statistics systems;
12. *Encourages* the Economic Commission for Africa, as the secretariat of the APAI-CRVS, to enhance research and development efforts, which foster methodologies that improve the processes pertaining to civil registration and vital statistics among African Union member States;
13. *Requests* the African Development Bank to lead the resource mobilization efforts to improve civil registration and vital statistics systems;
14. *Invites* African Union member States to put in place appropriate legal frameworks to promote civil registration and vital statistics systems through the involvement of all stakeholders;

15. *Encourages* the African Union Commission and the Economic Commission for Africa, with the aim of enhancing their oversight role, to coordinate and harmonize the actions of various partners;
16. *Invites* African Union member States to put in place an environment conducive to the involvement of all stakeholders in the promotion of civil registration and vital statistics systems;
17. *Encourages* African Union member States to develop shared information and communication technology assets in support of effective civil registration and vital statistics systems for the continent, which are built to common standards and are interoperable with other governmental systems, such as health and identity management;
18. *Recommends* that August 10 should be declared Civil Registration and Vital Statistics Day, and *calls upon* African Union member States to observe the day;
19. *Encourages* the Economic Commission for Africa, as the secretariat of APAI-CRVS, to lead the development of common information communication technology assets to support effective civil registration and vital statistics systems across Africa, ensuring the highest standards of data protection and confidentiality of personal data, in order to promote interoperability among civil registration, health and identity management systems, and having the flexibility to meet the needs of all African countries;
20. *Encourages* member States to include refugees, internally displaced persons and persons at risk of statelessness in civil registration and vital statistics systems and factor them into improvement strategies and scaling-up plans;
21. *Accepts* the proposal made by the Republic of Zambia to host the fifth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics in Lusaka;
22. *Expresses* its gratitude to the Islamic Republic of Mauritania for its warm hospitality and the successful organization of the Fourth Conference of African Ministers Responsible for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics.

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