

AFRICAN UNION

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UNION AFRICAINE

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ANNUAL REPORT ON THE AU CAMPAIGN TO END CHILD MARRIAGE
BY HIS EXCELLENCY
PRESIDENT EDGAR CHAGWA LUNGU,
PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF ZAMBIA
AND
LEADER ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN AFRICA

**EXCELLENCES,
DISTINGUISHED GUESTS**

ALL AFRICAN COUNTRIES ARE FACED WITH THE CHALLENGE OF CHILD MARRIAGE, A HARMFUL TRADITIONAL PRACTICE THAT ROBBS GIRLS OF THEIR EDUCATION, THEIR HEALTH AND THEIR FUTURE. IN AFRICA, HIGH RATES OF CHILD MARRIAGE COMBINED WITH A RAPIDLY GROWING POPULATION COULD HAVE DEVASTATING HUMAN AND DEVELOPMENT CONSEQUENCES.

TO THIS EFFECT, I HAVE THE PLEASURE TO PRESENT THE PROGRESS AND SUCCESS OF THE AFRICAN UNION (AU) CAMPAIGN TO END CHILD MARRIAGE IN AFRICA OF WHICH I WAS GIVEN THE HONOUR OF BEING NAMED THE AFRICAN CHAMPION ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN 2017. THIS BRIEF REPORT WILL MAINLY FOCUS ON 2018 - 2019 ACTIVITIES AND ACHIEVEMENTS OF THE CAMPAIGN ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IN AFRICA. ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IS ESSENTIAL FOR AFRICA TO REALISE OUR AGENDA 2063 AND THE GLOBAL SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS AND ENABLE MILLIONS OF GIRLS THE OPPORTUNITY FOR A BETTER LIFE AND TO REALIZE THEIR FULL POTENTIAL. IT ALSO HELPS AVERT SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC COSTS RELATED TO FERTILITY, HEALTH, NUTRITION, EDUCATION AND EARNINGS NOT ONLY FOR THE GIRL BRIDES, BUT ALSO FOR THEIR FAMILIES AND THE COUNTRIES WHERE THE PRACTICE PREVAILS.

AS ONE OF THE MANDATES OF THE CAMPAIGN, MEMBER STATES LAUNCHED SPECIFIC CAMPAIGNS IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES. THESE LAUNCHES ARE ESSENTIAL TO THE ENHANCEMENT OF ADVOCACY AGAINST CHILD MARRIAGE AT A NATIONAL LEVEL. IT HAS BEEN INSPIRING TO SEE MEMBER STATES SHOW SUCH COMMITMENT TO ENDING THIS HARMFUL PRACTICE IN THEIR RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES. I WOULD LIKE TO REPORT THAT THE AU CAMPAIGN HAS SO FAR BEEN LAUNCHED IN 29 COUNTRIES (BENIN, BURKINA FASO, CAMEROON, CHAD, COTE D'IVOIRE, DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO, EGYPT, ERITREA, ETHIOPIA, GAMBIA, GHANA, GUINEA-CONAKRY, KENYA, LESOTHO, LIBERIA, MADAGASCAR, MALAWI, MALI, MAURITANIA, MOZAMBIQUE, NIGER, NIGERIA, SENEGAL, SIERRA LEONE, SUDAN, TANZANIA, UGANDA, ZAMBIA AND ZIMBABWE).

I TAKE THIS OPPORTUNITY TO ENCOURAGE OTHER MEMBER STATES TO ALSO LAUNCH THE CAMPAIGN AT NATIONAL LEVEL, MOBILISE COMMUNITIES AND TAKE OWNERSHIP AND ACCOUNTABILITY TO END CHILD MARRIAGE. I NOW LOOK AT YOU ALL AND ASK THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS: CAN WE REALLY AFFORD NOT TO END CHILD MARRIAGE? CAN WE TURN OUR HEADS AND ACT LIKE IT IS A SOCIAL NORM THAT IS ACCEPTABLE?

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THE AU UNDERTOOK AN EVALUATION FOR THE PERIOD 2016 – 2018 TO SEE HOW FAR THE CAMPAIGN HAS PROGRESSED AND WHETHER IT HAD IMPACT IF ANY ON THE CONTINENT. THIS EVALUATION IS MEANT TO GUIDE THE NEW 5 YEAR PHASE OF THE CAMPAIGN. THE EVALUATION OBSERVED THAT THE CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN EFFECTIVE IN IMPLEMENTING A NUMBER OF ITS CORE MANDATES. THIS HAS BEEN MAINLY IN ADVOCACY AND CAPACITY BUILDING AT THE CONTINENTAL LEVEL. THIS IS EVIDENT BY AN ANNUAL INCREASE IN NUMBER OF MEMBER STATES LAUNCHING THE CAMPAIGN TO END CHILD MARRIAGE, AND THE NUMBER OF HIGH-LEVEL ADVOCACY AND CAPACITY BUILDING EVENTS ORGANISED SINCE THE 2016 EVALUATION.

THE CAMPAIGN HAS SHOWN STRENGTH IN ORGANISING AND COORDINATING HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS TO BRING CHILD MARRIAGE ISSUES TO THE FORE AND INFLUENCE GOVERNMENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS TO TAKE ACTION TO END CHILD MARRIAGE. THIS HAS BEEN HIGHLIGHTED IN OTHER SECTIONS OF THE REPORT. HOWEVER, MORE ANALYSIS IS NEEDED TO LINK THE OUTCOMES, RESOLUTIONS AND COMMITMENTS BY MEMBER STATES AT THESE HIGH-LEVEL MEETINGS TO THE POSSIBLE CHANGES OR IMPACT AT MEMBER STATE LEVEL. THIS IS IMPORTANT TO DEMONSTRATE HOW THESE MEETINGS LEAD TO ACTUAL RESULTS AND CHANGES ON THE GROUND.

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WHILST THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION CONDUCTS ROUTINE VISITS TO MEMBER STATES TO MONITOR POST LAUNCH PROGRESS, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT THESE VISITS ARE GUIDED BY THE MONITORING AND EVALUATION PLANS. THESE PLANS WILL ENSURE THAT THE VISITS ARE CONDUCTED TIMELY AND STRATEGICALLY TOWARDS THE DOCUMENTATION AND MONITORING OF IMPLEMENTATION OF COMMITMENTS MADE BY MEMBER STATES, AND COLLECT DOCUMENTS ON POST LAUNCH PROGRESS AND OTHER COUNTRY DATA. STANDARD TOOLS AND A REPORTING TEMPLATE SHOULD BE DEVELOPED AND USED BY THE CAMPAIGN TEAM TO ENSURE CONSISTENCY OF MONITORING DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING. IN ADDITION, A CAMPAIGN DATABASE DEVELOPED DURING THE 2016 REVIEW MEETING NEEDS TO BE UPDATED ROUTINELY TO PROVIDE HISTORICAL INFORMATION ON THE CAMPAIGN AND GUIDE KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT ACROSS THE CAMPAIGN TEAM. THERE IS THEREFORE NEED FOR THE AU TO WORK CLOSELY WITH THE NATIONAL INSTITUTIONS ESPECIALLY THE MINISTRIES RESPONSIBLE FOR GENDER TO ENSURE THAT THE RESULTS OF THE CAMPAIGN ARE A TRUE REFLECTION OF THE POSITIVE STRIDES BEING MADE IN THE RESPECTIVE COUNTRIES.

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FOLLOWING THE ABOVE MENTIONED EVALUATION, THE HONOURABLE MINISTERS ADOPTED A DECISION TO EXTEND THE CAMPAIGN FOR ANOTHER 5 YEARS (2019 – 2023) AND TO DEVELOP A COMPREHENSIVE STRATEGY ON THE NEW PHASE OF THE CAMPAIGN, CLEARLY OUTLINING AN IMPLEMENTATION PLAN, THEORY OF CHANGE AND AN ACCOUNTABILITY FRAMEWORK IN ORDER TO STRENGTHEN THE CAMPAIGN'S WORK ON THE CONTINENT. THIS WAS DONE DURING THE 3RD SPECIALISED TECHNICAL COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT, LABOUR AND EMPLOYMENT HELD IN ADDIS ABABA, ETHIOPIA FROM 1ST TO 5TH APRIL 2019. WE ARE ALL ACCOUNTABLE TO ENSURE THAT HARMFUL PRACTICES SUCH AS CHILD MARRIAGE AND FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION ARE NO LONGER IN OUR VOCABULARY. THE ONLY VOCABULARY THAT SHOULD EXIST FOR OUR GIRLS IS IN

EDUCATION, MAKING SURE THEY ARE SAFE, HEALTHY AND GOING TO SCHOOL TO BECOME THE WOMEN THEY ASPIRE TO BE. THE NEW STRATEGIC PLAN WILL INVOLVE THE ROLES OF DIFFERENT STAKEHOLDERS SUCH AS MEMBER STATES, RELIGIOUS AND TRADITIONAL LEADERS, REGIONAL ECONOMIC COMMUNITIES, YOUTH, CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS INCLUDING GRASSROOT COMMUNITIES AND DEVELOPMENT PARTNERS AMONG OTHERS.

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DESPITE THE NUMEROUS ACHIEVEMENTS THE CAMPAIGN HAS ATTAINED, ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE IS AN UPHILL BATTLE THAT REQUIRES A COLLECTIVE EFFORT. AS WE FOCUS ON PREVENTING AND ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE, WE MUST ALSO FOCUS ON THE HIGH LEVELS OF TEEN PREGNANCIES AND THE NEED TO ENSURE THAT ADOLESCENTS HAVE ACCESS TO SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH SERVICES. GIRLS WHO HAVE BEEN MOTHERS SHOULD BE GIVEN THE CHANCE TO BE READMITTED INTO SCHOOLS AS THEY HAVE THE RIGHT TO COMPLETE THEIR EDUCATION. I, THEREFORE, APPEAL TO YOU MY PEERS, NOT TO GIVE UP ON THESE GIRLS OR TURN YOUR BACKS ON THEM, EVEN IF THEY HAVE CHILDREN WHILE THEY ARE CHILDREN THEMSELVES. ALLOW THEM THROUGH YOUR POLICIES AND PROGRAMS TO GET THE EDUCATION THEY SO MUCH NEED IN ORDER TO AVOID INTERGENERATIONAL POVERTY FOR THEIR OWN CHILDREN. THEY DESERVE THIS CHANCE BECAUSE DENYING THEM RE-ADMISSION INTO SCHOOL AND FAILING TO ADDRESS STIGMA ASSOCIATED WITH EARLY MOTHERHOOD, FURTHER JEOPARDISES THEIR LIVES AND THAT OF THEIR CHILDREN.

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I WISH TO HIGHLIGHT A KEY EVENT THAT IS UPCOMING IN JUNE 2020 TO COINCIDE WITH THE DAY OF THE AFRICAN CHILD - THE 3RD AFRICAN GIRLS' SUMMIT ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE. THE EVENT WILL BE ADDRESSING THEMES ON ZERO TOLERANCE ON GENDER BASED VIOLENCE INCLUDING THE CAMPAIGN'S HASHTAG

ON “**ENOUGH WITH THE SILENCE**” AROUND GIRLS BEING HURT IN ANY FORM PARTICULARLY GIRLS IN CONFLICT AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATIONS AND GIRLS WITH DISABILITIES, WHO ARE OFTEN INVISIBLE.

TODAY, OVER ONE IN THREE YOUNG WOMEN IN AFRICA WERE MARRIED IN CHILDHOOD, AND ONE IN TEN BEFORE THEIR 15TH BIRTHDAY. ACCORDING TO UNICEF, IT WOULD TAKE AT LEAST A CENTURY TO ELIMINATE THE PRACTICE UNLESS URGENT ACTION IS TAKEN. THEREFORE, I ENCOURAGE MY FELLOW PEERS TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL STRATEGIES TO END CHILD MARRIAGE AND ALIGNING THEM TO THE AFRICAN COMMON POSITION TO END CHILD MARRIAGE; PUTTING IN PLACE SPECIFIC LAWS TO PROSECUTE ALL PARTIES THAT PROMOTE CHILD MARRIAGE; ALLOCATE THE NECESSARY RESOURCES TO KEEP OUR GIRLS AND ALSO BOYS IN SCHOOL AND ENCOURAGE THAT POTENTIAL THAT THEY HAVE FOR THEMSELVES AND FOR THE NATION AS A WHOLE. THESE WILL FORM THE BASIS OF THE AU CAMPAIGN ON ENDING CHILD MARRIAGE BEYOND 2018 AND HELP US REACH OUR GOAL TO END THESE HARMFUL PRACTICES.

I THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!

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Annual Report on the AU Campaign to end Child Marriage by His Excellency President Edgar Chagwa Lungu, President of the Republic of Zambia and Leader on Ending Child Marriage in Africa

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