

Draft Statement: Dorothy Rozga, Deputy Regional Director, ESAR.

Excellencies etc,

It is my privilege to participate at this very first meeting of Ministers in Charge of Civil Registration from all of Africa. I thank the organizers for the opportunity given to UNICEF and the UN community to be part of this effort.

I would like to begin by commending the UN Economic Commission for Africa, the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank and other partners including the UN Statistical Division and the Health Metrics Network for their leadership and the amount of preparatory work that has gone into this meeting.

I would like to commend the delegates to this meeting including the Expert Group meeting for their valuable contributions to the deliberations.

At this time I would like to reconfirm the support of UNICEF to the efforts to strengthen civil registration and to the Regional Medium Term Plan that is being finalized at this meeting.

'We must also recognise the centrality of civil registration to other important development process such as the emergence of social protection, as stipulated in the African Union Social Policy Framework. The emergence and scaling out of a range of instruments such as child support grants, foster grants and pensions are reliant on birth and death registration schemes.

In contexts of high HIV and AIDS burden, the importance of death registration for access to social benefits as well as ensuring inheritance rights is paramount. Elder carers of children affected by AIDS may be reliant on pensions or other benefits where registration and certification are prerequisites. In return, social protection schemes can indeed be a powerful incentive for birth and death registration where they are conditions for accessing benefits.'

At this time I would like to recall some of the specific areas of work where we are supporting governments in Africa and elsewhere that is directly relevant to the subject of this conference

- Advocacy with the political, community and religious leaders; with partners and others on the importance of registration of births of children, the first recognition of an individual in the eyes of the law.
- Continuing support to governments in the area of legal reforms; harmonization of legal frameworks with the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child; and for

developing policies and strategies that further registration of births of children.

- Introducing innovative approaches including mobile registration and use of ICT like use of mobile phones for quickly increasing coverage.
- Supporting efforts to extend registration of births of children who might be excluded due to geographical or other barriers
- Contribute to enhancing capacity in the people and systems by supporting training of key personnel, working with partners including the UN Division of Statistics.
- With respect to the Regional Medium Term Plan – we wish to assist in the preparation of country assessment plans as the first step.

We would like to add two specific suggestions for your consideration. One is to support the practical recommendation made in the Expert Group meeting, to extend the time frame for the Regional Medium Term Plan to 2015 to coincide with the target date for achievement of the MDGs.

Second, we would like to suggest that a specific sub goal be adopted in the Plan to achieve Universal Birth Registration (to be defined as registration of births of at least 90 percent of children born in the year) by 2015. While we see birth registration as an integral part of Civil Registration, we see birth registration as a component where our organization has a specific mandate for work and some experience of work in supporting efforts in as many as 78 countries around the world.

When the African Union decided to observe the theme of the African Day of the Child in 2003 as Birth Registration, it led to a continent wide awakening to one of the key human rights that practically every government has conferred upon its children. The sub goal we suggest would be a fitting culmination to that call for action from the African Union.

Excellencies, friends,

This is a good time for us to reflect on the leadership that Africa has provided in the articulation of the Millennium Development Goals for the world.

You will recall that your governments at the historic First Pan African Forum on Children and Young People in Cairo in May 2001 adopted the African Common Position on Children, known as “Africa Fit for Children”. This African common position had a huge impact when the UN General Assembly debated and adopted a global Declaration and Plan of Action entitled “A World Fit for Children” a year later at the UN General Assembly’s Special Session on Children in May 2002.

Africa’s contribution to the global definition of children’s rights and priorities began even earlier. As a Key Note speaker noted at the Cairo meeting in 2001, the “needs

of Africa's children and the views of Africa's leaders were very much the driving force behind the World Summit for Children in 1990".¹ This historic World Summit gave us the "First Call for Children" committing governments around the world to allocate resources and priorities to children.

The goals of the World Summit for Children eventually were transformed into the heart of the Millennium Development Goals a decade later. As the world now gears up to the final few years for the achievement of the MDGs, I believe this meeting offers us an opportunity to make a very special contribution to the achievement of the Goals.

The mandate for strengthening birth and civil registration is also reflected in the "Call for Accelerated Action in the Implementation of the Plan of Action Towards Africa Fit for Children (2008-2012)" adopted at the Second Pan African meeting in Cairo at the end of 2007.

In conclusion, I am happy to inform you that UNICEF is supporting the AUC's Department of Economic Affairs to establish a new online data base platform for AU as a whole to be known as *AfricaInfo*. This is part of UNICEF's global efforts for supporting updated databases that would inform decision making processes and programme action. We hope that this tool will be of direct and practical use in the efforts for monitoring progress in the strengthening of Civil Registration systems.

Thank you for your attention.

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