Thabo Mokgola

Africa is in need of synchronised civil registration, says South African Home Affairs Minister Dr Dlamini-Zuma.

Thabo Mokgola reports

A comprehensive and institutionalised civil registration system in Africa will go a long way in ensuring the development of a regional framework to register important events in life, such as births, deaths, marriages and divorces, says Home Affairs Minister and incoming African Union Commission (AUC) Chairperson, Dr Nkosazana Dlamini-Zuma.

Addressing media ahead of the ministerial conference on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics, Dr Dlamini-Zuma emphasised the importance of such an approach, saying it will play an integral role in developing countries in relation to planning.

This would include planning for healthcare, universal education, realisation of Millennium Development Goals as well as African integration.

“This is important because up to now there has not been a uniformed civic registration in all the countries in the continent. Some countries do a census once in 10 years and that is it,” Dr Dlamini-Zuma said.

A synchronised civil registration system, the minister added, would facilitate the free movement of goods and people and a uniformed framework would facilitate easy integration.

“We talk now of integration of the continent but integration is not just about infrastructure but about people. You cannot have free movement of people if you do not know who is moving from where,” Dr Dlamini-Zuma explained.

Today’s ministerial meeting, which comes hot on the heels of the meeting of experts, will assess progress from the inaugural gathering held in Ethiopia in 2010, share best practices, look at the way forward as well as create awareness on the importance of CRVS.

Minister Dlamini-Zuma singled out the latter as an integral aspect in the success of CRVS.

“You can have everything in place, including finances and the laws but if the population is not aware and conscious about the need and the importance of civil registration we will not succeed,” she said.

Speaking at the same briefing, United Nations Economic Commission for Africa’s (UNECA) Director for African Centre for Statistics, Dr Dimitri Sanga said, at the Ethiopia meeting, ministers mandated the technical team to undertake a thorough assessment on the state of civil registration in different African countries, a report which will be presented at this meeting.

“The situation is quite diverse. In some countries birth registration is below 10% and this is critical because any measure that we will be taking needs to be attached to targets because when ministers meet they are able to mobilise human, financial and technical assistance to make sure that these African countries improve on birth registration,” Dr Sanga said.

The second step would be to set targets for these countries and cooperate with them in assessing their specific challenges and once diagnosed, support mechanisms would have to be devised to remedy the situation, said Dr Sanga.

Furthermore, civil registration was far more than registration of births, deaths, marriages and divorces.

“It is a human rights issue,” he said, citing issues of the utilisation of child soldiers by the militia in war-torn countries.

When putting together post-war programmes to facilitate the reintroduction to education and training, Dr Sanga explained, there needs to be certainty with regards to age authenticity.

“For that you need to be in possession of a birth certificate for us to ascertain that you are dealing with young people,” he said, adding that this phenomenon was extended to issues such as early marriages and court appearances by minors.

Conference logo launched

A new logo for Civil Registration and Vital Statistics (CRVS) conference was unveiled to the media a week ago, ahead of the ministerial conference starting today, writes Kgoaegelise Moliboute.

The South African Department of Home Affairs Director-General Mkuseli Apleni and the Statistician-General Pali Lehohla attended the briefing.

The logo depicts 54 people representing African countries and tells a story of unity, strength, and saving lives.

At issue is what experts describe as “scandal of invisibility”, a continent-wide problem. “The scandal of invisibility is so huge that children are born and die even before they are known. Adults roam the country without their existence ever being recorded,” said Lehohla.

Now, African ministers who are responsible for civil registration meet in Durban to deliberate on the CRVS and discuss plans being recommended by the experts. The CRVS conference is taking place under the auspices of UNECA and the Home Affairs is a lead department. It is expected that the conference will confront challenges caused by the absence of the reliable vital events data such as births, deaths, marriages and divorces on the African continent.

“Such statistics enable government to plan holistically for their national development and planning with a view to providing quality services to their citizenry,” said Apleni. At the media briefing ahead of the conference, Apleni said that for any country to plan accurately, it first needed to know how many citizens it had. “It is important to know how many people are on the continent, particularly as African countries try to work together and toil through the challenges,” he said.

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The 2nd Conference of African Ministers of Home Affairs was held in the KwaZulu Natal Province, Durban, in the International Convention Centre on Monday, with reports on civil registration from African countries complementing the meeting.

The conference was held to deliberate on how the continent can achieve effective implementation of civil registration in Africa.

Delegates from over 30 African countries attended the conference, which was held at the Durban International Convention Centre in Durban at the invitation of the KwaZulu Natal Premier, Mr. David Makhura.

The delegates deliberated on various topics such as the development of civil registration and the way forward for its implementation in Africa. They also discussed the role of civil registration in the context of development, peace and security.

The conference was opened by the KwaZulu Natal Premier, Mr. David Makhura, who welcomed the delegates and expressed their gratitude for attending the conference.

The delegates also heard from various speakers, including the South African Deputy President, Mr. Cyril Ramaphosa, who delivered a keynote address on the importance of civil registration in Africa. Other speakers included the UNICEF Representative, Mr. Lasantha Welivita, who highlighted the importance of civil registration in promoting human rights and development.

The conference also heard from various African countries, including South Africa, Kenya, and Tanzania, who shared their experiences and best practices in the implementation of civil registration.

The delegates agreed on the need for a strong and effective civil registration system in Africa, which is critical for development, peace and security.

The conference concluded with a call for action and urged all African countries to work together to implement effective civil registration systems.

The delegates also agreed to establish a taskforce to monitor the implementation of civil registration in Africa and to report back to the next conference.

In closing, the conference declared that civil registration is a fundamental right of every human being and that it is essential for development, peace and security in Africa.
AFRICA Saluting CRVS in Durban!

Unity, Strength, Saving Lives
AmeriCorps member Francesca Kameni, who is completing her year of service in a small town in eastern Kenya, joined other volunteers working on a project to help people gain access to civil registration and birth certificates. Kameni is working with the local government to establish a new birth registration system, which will provide citizens with the documentation they need to access basic services such as education and health care. Kameni said her project is part of a larger initiative to improve access to essential services in rural areas, where many people do not have access to basic registration and identification documentation.

Kameni’s work is part of a broader effort to improve civil registration and birth certificate systems around the world. In many countries, access to these services is limited, with some people living in areas where no official registration system exists. This lack of access can have serious consequences, as citizens may not be able to access basic services or participate in political processes. To address this issue, many countries have implemented reforms to improve access to civil registration and birth certificates. These efforts have been supported by international organizations such as the United Nations and the World Health Organization, which have provided funding and technical assistance to help countries improve their registration systems.

Despite these efforts, however, many challenges remain. In some cases, lack of political will or other factors have slowed progress. In other cases, the systems that have been established are not effective or are not reaching all citizens. To address these challenges, it is important to continue to invest in improving civil registration and birth certificate systems, and to work with communities to ensure that they are accessible and effective for all citizens.
Planning the CRVS road into AFRICA

THE JOURNEY CONTINUES...