PRESS RELEASE

President John Mahama Launches the African Union Campaign to End Child Marriage in Ghana

Accra, Ghana, 10 February 2016—In an effort to strengthen and accelerate national consciousness and action towards ending child marriage, the Government of the Republic of Ghana has now launched the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa. In his keynote address, Mr. John Dramani Mahama, President of the Republic of Ghana, noted that, “Child marriage is the most obnoxious practice of the 21st century and a total violation of the rights of children, especially the girl-child”. The Launch of the campaign took place on the margins of the 7th African Conference on Sexual and Health Rights hosted by the Organisation of African First Ladies against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA).

The Republic of Ghana is the 11th African Nation to launch the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage. The Ghanaian launch of the campaign took place in Accra at the State Banquet Hall, and was hosted by H.E. Lordina Mahama, First Lady of Ghana and President of OAFLA. The First lady was among 11 first ladies present at the launch, which included the First Ladies of Ethiopia, Kenya and Sierra Leone. Other prominent attendees included Naa Prof. J.S. Nabila, president of the National House of Chiefs, as the voice of traditional leaders. The Ghanaian First Lady noted the need for immediate and widespread action in addressing the implications of child marriage as well as the disempowerment of African girls and women.

In Ghana, despite the legal age of marriage being 18 for both girls and boys, 21% of Ghanaian girls are married before they reach the age of 18 years with rates amounting to as high as 50% in the northern part of the country. Alarmingly, girls can marry as young as 16 with the consent of their parents. Her Excellency, Hon. Nana Oye Lithur, the Minister of Gender, Children and Social Protection highlighted the need for a multi-sectoral approach toward addressing the issue, thus, engaging local communities to

strengthen their efforts in standing by the Campaign and to accelerate dialogue between religious leaders, civil society organizations, men, boys and the youth.

The launch highlights an increased political commitment to end child marriage in Ghana, with the development of a national strategy making what was once a controversial issue firmly represented on the political agenda. Ms. Christine Muhigana, the UNICEF Deputy Regional Director for West and Central Africa noted that keeping girls in school and allowing them pursue their dreams would contribute immensely to the socio-economic development of the continent.

On behalf of the African Union Commission, the Commissioner for Social Affairs, His Excellency, Dr Mustapha Sidiki Kalokoko, congratulated the Government of Ghana on the bold step of launching the AU Campaign and a national strategy on ending child marriage. The Commissioner emphasized the need to ensure that the implementation of the strategy reaches the communities mostly affected by the harmful practice of child marriage and encouraged all stakeholders to collectively work towards assuring that the campaign launch delivers the required change and relief for young girls and adolescents.

About the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa:

The AU Campaign to End Child Marriage was launched at the continental level in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia on 29 May, 2014, during the Conference of Ministers of Social Development. The Campaign is aimed at ending child marriage by means of supporting and advocating legal and policy actions in the protection and promotion of human rights; mobilizing continental awareness of the adverse socio-economic impact of child marriage; fostering social movement and social mobilization at the grassroots and national levels; and amplifying the capacity of non-state actors to undertake evidence-based policy advocacy including the role of youth leadership through new media technology, monitoring and evaluation - amongst others.

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