



DIRECTORATE OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION

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**OAFLA vows outcome of 18<sup>th</sup> General Assembly must be the source of transformation into healthy populations and a launch pad for moving Africa from poverty to prosperity without leaving the youth behind.**



Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 31 January 2017- The 18<sup>th</sup> Ordinary General Assembly of Organization of African First Ladies Against HIV/AIDS (OAFLA) convened today at the Headquarters of the African Union (AU) and deliberated on the theme “Building on 15 years of engagement to harness the demographic dividend of Africa through promoting the needs of adolescents and their access to youth-friendly health service”.

Commemorating its 15th Anniversary, this special session recalled its commitment, solidarity and impact in offering 15 years of continental wide strategic leadership in terms of advocacy in areas of HIV and AIDS, Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (MNCH) and cervical cancer. African First Ladies have long been advocating and calling for higher levels of national and international attention and action towards issues that are otherwise neglected or inadequately pursued.

In her welcome remarks H.E. Mrs. Roman Tesfaye, First Lady of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia called upon First Ladies to continue leveraging their role and using

their influence to facilitate sustainable solutions to the multitude of challenges facing Africans daily. She underlined that their advocacy should continue to identify and address root causes of these. “We should remain focused in our advocacy to change attitudes, cultural norms as well as legal, political and institutional barriers that are standing in the way of Africa’s transformation,” she added.

H.E. Mrs. Gertrude Mutharika, First Lady of the Republic of Malawi and President of OAFLA reminded First Ladies that the theme of the Summit is most relevant to OAFLA as it provides a platform for strategic focus for the organization. “Today we have chosen to commemorate the 15 years of OAFLA work by focusing on ways of harnessing the demographic dividend of Africa. ... The fight against AIDS need to divert more attention to young men and women, girls and boys who comprise a majority of our population in our respective countries.” She emphasised.

Witnessing OAFLA’s continued growth in terms of reach and impact during his tenure as Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African Union Commission (AUC), His Excellency Dr. Mustapha S.



Excellency Dr. Mustapha S. Kaloko, represented during the meeting by the Head of Health Nutrition and Population, Social Affairs said “I have seen that OAFLA is broadening its mandate to address Maternal, Newborn and Child Health and being an outspoken voice against child marriages. It is within the power of First Ladies as mothers of the nations to ensure that there are no new maternal, newborn and child deaths and to ensure that girls

are not brides. The role of African First Ladies in Member States that have launched the AU Campaign to End Child Marriage has been significant to the point where these countries now have clearly defined national strategies and action plans to end the harmful practice of child marriage.”

Highlighting AU’s work in this regard, he recalled that AU launched the continent wide Campaign to End Child Marriage on 29 May 2014, with a focus on policy advocacy for the protection and promotion of human rights; accelerating change across the continent by encouraging African governments to develop strategies to raise awareness and address the harmful impact of child marriage as well as expediting and invigorating the movement to end the practice. He added: “This campaign is running concurrently with our flagship AU Campaign on the Accelerated Reduction of Maternal Mortality in Africa (CARMMA) which many countries are implementing on the continent.”

During the one day open session meeting, Members of OAFLA reported to the Assembly on critical works performed, significant accomplishments and advocacy carried out in their respective countries.

Mr. Michel Sidibe, Executive Director UNAIDS testified that OAFLA pushed to break the bureaucracy of silence, stigma and discrimination. He also acknowledged without efforts of OAFLA, the face of AIDS would have never changed. He called for continued support of the 'START FREE, STAY FREE AND AIDS FREE', a Super – Fast – Track framework and action plan that provides menu of policy and programmatic actions designed to enable countries to close the remaining HIV prevention and treatment gap for children, adolescents young women and expectant mothers.



The Assembly echoed the work OAFLA is entrusted with –namely, “An Africa free from HIV and AIDS, maternal, newborn and child mortality, an Africa where women adolescent girls, and children are empowered to enjoy equal opportunities. These goals are fundamental for achieving all the seven aspirations of Agenda 2063.

African First Ladies issued a Communique of the 18<sup>th</sup> OAFLA General Assembly.

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