AU High Level Event hosted by the President of the Republic of Zambia, HE Edgar Chagwa Lungu, in collaboration with UN Women and the AU Commission

Transforming traditions, norms, customs and cultures to end Child Marriage and FGM/C in Africa:
Joining hands with Traditional and Cultural Leaders

Sheraton Hotel - Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, 10th February 2019

Summary Report
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Overview
The Government of Zambia in collaboration with UN Women and the African Union Commission convened a breakfast side event in the margins of the AU Heads of State Summit at Sheraton Hotel on 10th February 2019 in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. The event provided an opportunity for the AU Champion on ending child marriage, the President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu, and Traditional and Cultural Leaders to secure and renew their commitments to escalating efforts to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa by 2030. The event focused on the importance of harnessing the influence of culture, customs, traditions and norms as key catalysts in the efforts to end Child Marriage and FGM/C including the development, review and enforcement of laws. In addition, the event provided space for the launch of the Traditional and Cultural Leaders movement to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa – Council of Traditional Leaders of Africa (COTLA)/ Conseil des Autorites Traditionnelles D'Afrique (CONATA).

COTLA/CONATA is a pan African movement of Traditional and Cultural Leaders to end child marriage, FGM/C and other harmful practices. COTLA/CONATA is platform for dialogue, consultation, consensus and action on preservation and harnessing the positive aspects, and transformation of culture to end child marriage and FGM/C, informed by deep shared values of human rights and gender equality.

The event was organized within the framework of Phase II of the AU Campaign to end Child Marriage (2019 to 2023), the AU Charter for African Cultural Renaissance, the Africa Youth Charter, the SDG Target 5:3 – “Eliminate all harmful practices, such as child, early and forced marriage and female genital mutilation”; the Maputo Declaration; and the AU Agenda 2063.

The event was attended by 80 participants including Traditional Leaders from across Africa, AU Commission officials, government officials, UN officials, and other institutions. The event was moderated by Dr Otive Igbuzor.

Session 1: Official Remarks and Statements
The President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu
HE Edgar Lungu welcomed all participants and appreciated the efforts and the energy the Traditional Leaders have brought to the initiatives to end child marriage and FGM/C and for pushing for this important event. Child Marriage and FGM/C are among the most retrogressive practices that require urgent actions as these practices violate the rights of women and girls. With Traditional and Cultural Leaders now leading the initiative to end child marriage and FGM/C, Africans should no longer hide behind culture, customs and traditions in perpetuating these harmful practices. He recognised the important role Traditional Leaders play in ensuring child marriage laws in Africa are sound and do not leave any loopholes for persistence of child marriage on the continent.

As the African Union Champion on ending child marriage, President Lungu said that he was not only pleased but greatly humbled that Traditional Leaders across Africa have joined forces with African governments and other stakeholders to embrace a zero tolerance to child marriage. He assured the participants that he will lobby the African Union Member States and partners to scale up resources to support the implementation of African Traditional Leaders’ Action Plan to address child marriage, FGM/C, and promote gender equality at country, regional and continental levels. He said that he will also advocate for the recognition by the AU of the Traditional Leaders initiative to end child marriage and FGM/C, and provide them a permanent seat in the AU to ensure ongoing dialogue on improving the rights and dignity of girls and women in Africa.
He concluded by expressing his profound gratitude for the Traditional Leaders’ valuable time and commitment to this very important step towards ending child marriage, female genital mutilation and other harmful practices in Africa.

**His Royal Highness Mfumu Difima, Kingdom of Kongo, Democratic Republic of Congo**

His Royal Highness Mfumu Difima thanked the President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu for accepting to host the dialogue with Traditional Leaders and be part of the launch of COTLA/CONATA. Traditional Leaders are committed to the promotion and ensuring the enforcement of laws setting 18 as legal age for marriage without exceptions across Africa.

Child marriage and FGM/C do not have any place in African culture, traditions and customs. He concluded by asking President Lungu to request Heads of State and Government to support Traditional Leaders action plans as they navigate their ways in the efforts to end child marriage and FGM, and ensuring that culture is no longer used to justify any harmful practices against girls and women in all communities on the continent.

**HRH Queen Mother Best Kemigishe, Kingdom of Tooro, Uganda**

HRH Queen Mother Best Kemigishe said that this moment had come when the world expected to see positive changes from all fronts for African girls and women. She had been looking forward to the time...
when Traditional Leaders would take the leadership to embrace positive cultural practices, traditions and customs while transforming and discarding the negative practices. The dialogues that took place in 2018 with the support of UN Women were valuable in engaging traditional leaders and other stakeholders in difficult conversations about child marriage and FGM/C. Her passion about ending harmful practices such as child marriage and FGM/C is re-energised through this milestone.

She concluded by saying that this is only the start of the big things that are yet to come with Traditional Leaders leading the way to treat girls and women with dignity and respecting their human rights. She thanked HE President Lungu for making the event possible.

Paramount Chief Kyungu, Malawi
Paramount Chief Kyungu said that the event was an opportunity for Traditional Leaders to commit themselves to the respect of the rights and dignity of girls and women in the presence of the AU Champion on ending child marriage, the President of the Republic of Zambia, His Excellency Edgar Chagwa Lungu. He called for continued collaboration between Traditional leaders and governments in Africa in harnessing the best from our cultures as we appreciate the role culture plays in achieving development and peace in all countries and communities. He noted that young girls should be protected from child marriage as this destroys their future, and from female genital mutilation and cutting as this defiles their virtue. This calls for the importance of action beyond commitments. He appealed to African Heads of State and Government to commit to working with Traditional Leaders to safeguard the rights of women and the girl child on the African continent so that all evil practices are completely wiped out.
He applauded HE President Lungu for organising the event that will leave a huge mark on the efforts to end the “barbaric practice” – child marriage. On behalf of all African Traditional Leaders, he expressed their serious commitment to remain focused on ensuring an Africa without Violence Against Women, FGM/C, and child marriage.

**Madame Cisse Mariama Mohamed, AU Director for Social Affairs**

Madame Cisse Mariama Mohamed thanked HE President Lungu for championing the AU Campaign to end child marriage in Africa and globally, and for hosting the event. She reiterated that the AU’s commitment to end child marriage in Africa.

She said that the Campaign to End Child Marriage in Africa which was launched on 29 May 2014 to accelerate and join regional and national ongoing efforts to end child marriage by: supporting national policy actions in the protection and promotion of human rights; mobilizing continental awareness of and engagement to end child marriage; and supporting the need for law enforcement to prosecute perpetrators of child marriage. The Campaign has now been launched in 28 countries which have shown their political commitment at national level to strengthen their strategies and laws to end child marriage. The support rendered by Member States to end child marriage has enabled the campaign to progress successfully and gain momentum. The AU Campaign to End Child Marriage was extended to end in 2023.

She said that the Commission has taken cognizance of the fact that child marriage is a multi-dimensional issue that has cultural, religious, economic dimensions; and that family and communities are the basic and most fundamental units in society. The role of Traditional and Religious Leaders is therefore instrumental to ending child marriage. As part of this commitment and campaign, the AU organised the Girl Summits to end child marriage in collaboration with the Government of Zambia in Lusaka, Zambia in 2015, and in collaboration with the Government of Ghana in Accra, Ghana in November 2018 which emphasized ‘the need for member states to establish educational funds in Africa to promote education for boys and girls and increase collaboration between religious and traditional leaders to exchange knowledge on best practices in Ending Child Marriage.’

She applauded the Government of Zambia for working closely with Traditional Leaders who are playing a prominent role in ending child marriage and respecting the dignity of girls and women through initiatives aimed at retaining girls in schools, and developing by-laws aimed at ending child
There have been exemplary traditional leaders spearheading the end of child marriage and protecting the girl child in communities in several countries such as, Zambia, Malawi, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Eritrea and Egypt. The AU Commission is committed to working with Traditional Leaders through COTLA/CONATA on the campaigns to end child marriage and FGM/C in Africa. She expressed AU’s commitment to support the Council which she said is key to ensuring that COTLA/CONATA achieves its intended goals and maximum impact at continental level. She thanked UN Women for engaging with Traditional Leaders who can play significant role in ensuring the human rights of girls and women are respected.

Session 2: Launch of COTLA/CONATA

HRM King Aderemi- Adedapo Alayemoro (Nigeria)

HRM King Aderemi- Adedapo Alayemoro thanked the President of the Republic of Zambia, HE Edgar Lungu for hosting the important event. He said that Traditional Leaders have an important role to play in Africa towards the attainment of development and peace. Traditional Leaders have helped achieve democracy and peace in Nigeria for example, and they will continue to playing that role. He said that the narrative that comes from the Western countries about African culture is always negative, which is not always the case. There are several aspects of African cultures that are very positive and progressive which need to be nurtured and embraced. Of course, there are some elements of culture, just as is the case in any other cultures in the world, that are negative. And these are the ones we need to either transform or eradicate guided by attainment of human rights, equality, and dignity for all. He said that it is against this background that, Traditional Leaders condemned child marriage and FGM/C during the West and Central Africa dialogue in Lagos, as barbaric practices that do not deserve any place in modern Africa.

As a result, he stated that they initiated the establishment of COTLA/CONATA, a Pan African platform of male and female Traditional and Cultural Leaders, primarily set up to galvanise the voices and actions of these Leaders across Africa to transform culture and eliminate negative cultural practices that harm girls and women in Africa. The platform is being established with the view to creating an institutionalized dialogue between Traditional and Cultural Leaders and the AU, regional bodies and governments for the preservation of, and to harness the positive aspects of culture to end child marriage and FGM/C, informed by deep shared values of human rights and gender equality. The platform was set up to provide space for addressing other emerging issues relevant to their jurisdictions in fast changing world. To ensure maximum impact at all levels including at community level, the platform will have cascading structures and regional, national and local levels and will ensure
maximum national reach and impact through engagement of all Traditional and Cultural Leaders nationally.

He concluded by saying that this is the best opportunity for Africans to set the positive agenda and narrative about Africa and its cultures with strong leadership of COTLA/CONATA.

Launch of COTLA/CONATA
HRH King Maiguizo Kane Mahaman Mansour (Niger) and HRH ALH, Dr Haliru Ndansu Yaahya, Emir of Shonga (Nigeria) joined H.E Edgar Chagwa Lungu, President of the Republic of Zambia, and Madame Cisse Mariama Mohamed, AU Acting Director for Social Affairs to officially launch COTLA/CONATA. The president was also joined by Dr Izeduwa Derek-Briggs, Regional Director UN Women ESARO and Dr. Julitta Onabanjo, Regional Director UNFPA ESARO during the launch COTLA/CONATA.

Closing Remarks
Mrs Nyaradzayi Gumbonzvanda, AU Goodwill Ambassador for Ending Child Marriage in Africa thanked H.E Edgar Chagwa Lungu, President of the Republic of Zambia and the AU Champion for ending child marriage for his humble gesture in hosting and launching COTLA/CONATA. She expressed her gratitude to Traditional Leaders who she had been with throughout the processes and dialogues from Nairobi through Blantyre and Lagos up to Addis Ababa where COTLA/CONATA was finally launched. She has hope that the movement of Traditional Leaders will play a critical role in embracing positive aspects of culture and transforming or eradicating harmful practices especially child marriage in Africa. She committed in her personal capacity as well as official capacity as AU Ambassador on ending child marriage, to continue to support and participate in activities implemented under COTLA/CONATA to ensure that child marriage no longer exists in Africa.
**Next Steps**
Following the side event and the launch of COTLA/CONATA, the following next steps were agreed upon:

- COTLA/CONATA to hold an inaugural meeting to agree on the formative processes and governance structure on 11th February 2019
- COTLA/CONATA to agree on Action Plan for 2019 and its implementation targets
- COTLA/CONATA to activate processes for developing formal partnerships with the AU, governments, intergovernmental bodies, and other regional bodies.

COTLA/CONATA logo is below: