

# AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL PRESS RELEASE

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## **Africa: Meeting of the African Committee of Experts - a positive step to promote and protect the rights of the African child**

Amnesty International today commended the commitment shown by those African states that have ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the African Children's Charter).

As the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (the Committee) prepares to meet in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, between 29 April-2 May 2002, the organization strongly urged participants to work towards the prompt and full realization of children's rights.

"This meeting is an important first step to begin the full implementation of the only African regional treaty providing for the legal protection of the health, physical, mental, moral and social development of the African Child. Henceforth, state parties can now be held accountable for their obligations to ensure children enjoy these rights without discrimination," said Amnesty International.

The states that have ratified the African Children's Charter as of 26 March 2002 are: Angola, Benin, Botswana, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Cape Verde, Chad, Egypt, Eritrea, The Gambia, Guinea, Kenya, Lesotho, Libya, Malawi, Mali, Mauritius, Mozambique, Niger, Rwanda, Senegal, Seychelles, South Africa, Togo, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

By ratifying the Charter, state parties have accepted the primary obligation to promote, protect and ensure the rights and welfare of children, and to submit to the Committee information on how they are implementing their obligations.

"The Committee can only achieve its mandate if it is able to function independently, and to develop its own rules of procedure and jurisprudence. States that have ratified must ensure that there is sufficient support, including funding, for the Committee to work competently and to act effectively," Amnesty International said. "Above all, the success of the Committee will depend on the will of the states to adhere

to the African Children's Charter in practice. Support from NGOs, civil society and the international community will also be essential for this Committee, to meet the challenges of the future," the organization added.

Amnesty International calls on all states that have not done so to ratify the African Children's Charter and to ensure its application domestically, including adopting or amending requisite legislation.

## **Background**

The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child was adopted in July 1990 and entered into force on 29 November 1999, after receiving the required 15 ratifications. The African Children's Charter guarantees to every human being below the age of 18 years the inherent right to life; education; health; freedom from all forms of economic exploitation. It also prohibits the use of the death penalty for crimes committed by children, and therecruitment of any child into armed conflicts.

The African Children's Charter provides for the establishment of an African Committee of Experts to *inter alia*: monitor the implementation and ensure protection of the rights enshrined in the Charter; interpret the provisions of the Charter; and formulate and lay down principles and rules aimed at protecting the rights and welfare of children in Africa. Amnesty International has campaigned for the ratification of the Charter. Immediately after the establishment of the Committee, Amnesty International made recommendations to it on issues to consider in adopting its rules of procedure. Amnesty International will continue to lobby African governments to ratify the African Children's Charter.

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