



Photos never lie: where was Voahangy Rajaonarimampianina African First Ladies' Addressing Root Causes of Poverty and Committing to Give a voice to the Voiceless

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Addis Ababa, 4 July 2017: The 19th Ordinary General Assembly of the Organization of First Ladies of Africa (OAFLA), was officially held today at the African Union Headquarters under 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 services".

H.E. Ms Amira EIFadil Mohamed, Commissioner for Social Affairs of the African Union Commission underlined that systematic and integrated approaches are needed in all the four areas of the demographic dividend pillars; health and wellbeing; employment and entrepreneurship; education and skills development and rights and good governance to register unprecedented progress, in turning the current youth bulge, into an economic dividend for Africa.

Sustainable and affordable access to maternal and child health care, HIV testing and counselling and immunization services, according to the Commissioner of Social Affairs, will ultimately result in young people meaningfully contributing to the socio-economic development of their society, thereby enabling them make the right informed decisions about their health. "The youth of our continent need to be guaranteed social and economic development if they are to contribute to their nations' and continents' economic development", she added.

In light of the extreme urgency in taking action for children, H.E. Amira EIFadil called upon development partners to support a Joint AU and OAFLA Campaign to Eliminate New HIV Infections in Children and Keep Mothers Alive as part of the Start Free, Stay Free, AIDS Free collaborative framework to accelerate the end of the AIDS epidemic among children, adolescents and young women by 2020.

Addressing the first ladies, H.E. Mrs. Roman Tesfaye, First Lady of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia, underscored that harnessing the demographic dividend of Africa is crucial for economic transformation. To realize this, she indicated that consolidating and scaling up best practices within a country and across the nations in Africa to ensure access to education for every child and youth in Africa and prevent avoidable death is mandatory.

Referring to the African Union Roadmap of Demographic Dividend, H.E. Mrs. Roman Tesfaye emphasized, "It is high time that African nations put in place favourable policies and increase youth targeted investments." Spreading the commitment, she encouraged first ladies by saying: "We need to lift and break the barriers faced by African youth in accessing and utilizing reproductive health information and services."

Representing H.E. Dr. Gertrude Mutharika, First Lady of the Republic of Malawi and former President of OAFLA, H.E. Mrs. Hinda Deby Ino, First Lady of Chad acknowledged development partners' important contributions and urged them to continue working with OAFLA in a sustained and resolute manner. In the same vein, encouraged first ladies to be abreast of new experiences, during the 19th General Assembly of OAFLA that will enable them to tackle challenges around the theme.

Guest of honour Prof. Frank Stangenberg-Haverkamp, Chairman of the Executive Board and Family Board of E. Merck KG, a leading science and technology company, said part that his company looks forward to long term partnership with OAFLA to support the health initiatives and subsequently improve access to healthcare solutions and advance people's lives through science and technology.

The dialogue highlighted the need for adolescent friendly access to health services, and the urge to support the implementation of the AU Roadmap to Harness the Demographic Dividend (DD), and for partners to coordinate their efforts towards harnessing the Demographic Dividend and support to OAFLA commitments.

The 19th General Assembly of OAFLA elected H.E. Mrs. Roman Tesfaye First Lady of Ethiopia to be OAFLA's President for the period 2017 – 2019. Similarly, the First Lady of Burkina Faso, H.E. Madame Adjoavi Sika KABORE was elected Vice President of OAFLA for the same period.

First ladies in Africa have played a vital role in building awareness, addressing social & economic development agendas and harnessing political commitment to the AIDS response and the broader health and development agenda particularly geared towards women, children and youth.

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