

## INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION DIRECTORATE

Press Release:

Venue: Niamey, Niger

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### AU/CIEFFA HOSTS KEY SESSION ON GIRLS' EDUCATION AT THE 3RD AFRICAN GIRLS SUMMIT

The African Union international Centre for Girls and Women's Education in Africa (AU/CIEFFA), organized a parallel session under the theme: *"Harnessing Girl's Education for the Africa We Want"* during the 3<sup>rd</sup> African Girls' Summit, which took place at the Mahatma Gandhi Conference Centre, in Niamey, Niger. The session was jointly hosted in partnership with UNAIDS, Girls Not Brides, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), UNESCO, UN WOMEN, UNICEF and UNFPA.



The 3<sup>rd</sup> African Girls' Summit seeks to draw attention to the social, legal and institutional issues around Culture, Human Rights and Accountability, as they intersect with the elimination of harmful practices, and look to take stock of progress since its first iteration in 2015.

In her opening remarks, Dr. Rita Bissoonauth, Head, AU/CIEFFA, outlined that "harnessing girls' education for the Africa we want" implies developing mechanisms and strategies so that at the political, administrative and community level the right to education of the girl child is implemented adequately at the level of African education administrations. She underlined that during the COVID-19 pandemic, there were more victims of gender-based violence and higher exclusion of girls from school. She further added that *"it is about making African education systems more resilient by giving wider access to girls who are facilitators, at best, producers of resilience"*.

Mr. Thomas Poirier, Senior Education Policy Analyst, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning (UNESCO IIEP) and Mundia Situmbeko, Girls Not Brides, presented key statistical evidence on gender parity in enrollment, teenage pregnancies, child marriage, gender-based stereotypes and roles in-and outside of schools as well as the key underlying challenges. *He stated that "Better planning and inclusive prevention mechanisms for continued education during crisis in African Member states"*,

A panel discussion including representatives of Member States, Youth and Civil Society shared lessons learnt, challenges and recommendations on important themes pertaining to legal and policy environments, innovations and strategies as well as partnerships and financing in education.

H.E. Mr. Mohamed Zeidane, Secretary General, Ministry of National Education, Niger shared different initiatives and policies that Niger is implementing to promote access to education for girls including the creation of gender units in all ministries not only in the Ministry of National Education, the adoption of a national strategy to accelerate the training of adolescent girls and young women to promote girls and women's education (GWE) in all schools. He explained that the initiatives are operationalized at the highest political commitment level by H.E President Mohamed Bazoum and 22% of the national budget is allocated to education in Niger.

Mr. Eskendir Lakew, Team Leader, Women, Children and Youth Directorate, Ministry of Education, Ethiopia, shed light on the challenges met in-country to ensure quality education for girls and women. To date, 6 million students are out of schools, amongst which 3,5 million are girls. In response, he explained how the Ministry with the support from UN Women held high-level policy dialogues which led to proposals for the development of a new curriculum and gender-responsive textbooks

Ms. Eline Versluys, UNGEI Secretariat underscored the Gender at the Centre initiative across 8 African countries, which is essential for ensuring girls education in Africa through Gender Responsive Education Sector Plans. She added that achieving gender equality in education across Africa requires transforming social norms through partnerships of govts, CSOs, development partners & young activists. This means believing in the abilities of girls in education *“Let us not be content with increasing girls’ access and enrollment rates to school but let’s go further in making school a place of real social change to transform social norms”* called Ms. Eline.

Haidara Mohamed, Executive Director, Songes, Niger outlined that his civil society organisation (CSO) platform was part of a platform to end child marriage in collaboration with other CSOs, Ministry of Education, development partners and to enable stakeholders promote girls’ education at grassroot levels. Through this platform, Songes tackles gender norms, financial and violence & abuse in schools. He issued a call on all *“to ensure quality and gender-responsive education for girls, create the conducive environments for girls to stay in schools, reduce violence in schools.”*

In the closing remarks, Dr. Sihaka Tsemo, Director, UNAIDS Liaison office to the AU and UN Economic Community of Africa, as the session moderator reminded delegates of the necessity of acting on the recommendations of the session and importance of adopting a multi-sectorial approach, involving all state and non-state actors, to holistically tackle the complex and multifaceted nature of the harmful practices and their impact on girls’ education. She recommended **collective action to face the multi-faceted challenges girls face in accessing education.**

**For further information, please contact:**

**Anoziva Marindire** | Information and Communications Officer | AU/CIEFFA | Email: [MarindireA@africa-union.org](mailto:MarindireA@africa-union.org)

**Ian Kaliwo** | Programs Officer | AU/CIEFFA | Email: [Kaliwol@africa-union.org](mailto:Kaliwol@africa-union.org)

**Information and Communication Directorate**, African Union Commission | **E-mail:** DIC@africa-union.org

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