



ACERWC
African Committee of Experts on
the Rights and Welfare of the Child

ACERWC Secretariat
E-mail: acerwc-secretariat@africa-union.org
Tel: +266 52 01 00 18 | P.O.Box: 13460
Address: Nala House, Balfour Road
Maseru - Kingdom of Lesotho

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STATEMENT OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD (ACERWC) ON THE OCCASION OF AFRICA ENVIRONMENT AND WANGARI MAATHAI DAY

3rd MARCH 2025

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child's (ACERWC/the Committee) Working Group on Climate Change and Children's Rights (the Working Group) joins AU Member States, Regional Economic Committees, and all concerned stakeholders across the continent to commemorate the Africa Environment and Wangari Maathai day on 3rd March 2025.

The Africa Environment and Wangari Maathai Day, is an opportunity to recognize the invaluable contributions of environmental defenders, including the late Nobel Laureate Wangari Maathai. In particular, the Committee would like to recognize African child environmental defenders, who advocate for the protection of the environment in their communities, schools, various children's forums and through peaceful protests, among others.

The ACERWC takes this opportunity to further highlight the grave adverse implications of the triple planetary crisis (climate change, pollution and biodiversity loss) on the rights and welfare of children in Africa. Among the triple planetary crisis, climate change stands out as one of the most concerning child protections challenges of the continent, with African children bearing the brunt of the global climate crisis. African children bear a disproportionate burden of climate-related disasters, including droughts, floods, food insecurity, and health crises. 25 out of 33 countries ranked as 'extremely high risk' for children

by UNICEF, in the context of climate change are in Africa. Climate-related disasters, particularly droughts and floods, have displaced millions of children, jeopardizing their right to education, health, and survival. Water scarcity and land degradation have exacerbated food insecurity, leading to malnutrition and developmental challenges among children. Marginalized children, girls, children with disabilities, and those in conflict zones are particularly vulnerable to climate-induced hardships.

This day is a reminder of the urgent need for climate justice. Climate change heightens existing inequalities, disproportionately affecting the poorest and most marginalized children. As *Wangari Maathai* championed environmental conservation and human rights, today, the ACERWC calls for collective action to integrate child rights into climate policies and programs.

Commitments and Calls to Action

Protect and empower child environmental defenders: The ACERWC calls on Member States to ensure the protection of child environmental defenders from persecution of any kind by establishing laws where they don't exist and enforcing existing protection laws. Furthermore, the Committee calls on member states to enhance the meaningful participation of children in all decisions related to the environment. Children must have a seat at the table in climate governance.

Ensure the inclusion of child-rights safeguards in environmental impact assessments: Member States should ensure that environmental impact assessments incorporate an assessment of impact on children's rights and wellbeing. Such assessments should cover short term and long-term environmental impacts of initiatives on children's rights and wellbeing.

Incorporate children's rights in climate action: The ACERWC urges Member States to implement child-rights based climate policies and uphold their obligations under the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC). Governments must integrate child rights into National Adaptation Plans (NAPs), Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) under the Paris Agreement and disaster response policies/action plans.

Promote environmental education and awareness: Governments should integrate environmental education, including education on climate change, into national curricula to equip children with knowledge on sustainability and conservation. Furthermore, measures should be taken to enhance access to information on climate change through dissemination of context relevant information on climate change and other environmental issues through mass media, with a particular focus on climate change adaptation mechanisms relevant for children and their families in various contexts.

As we commemorate this day, the ACERWC commends African child environmental defenders from all corners of the continent and reaffirms its commitment to highlight their voices and advocate for the fulfilment of their rights.

“We cannot tire or give up. We owe it to the present and future generations of all species to rise up and walk.” Wangari Maathai

Done in Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho

3 March, 2025.

For further information please contact:

Samrawit Getaneh, Legal Researcher, | ACERWC Secretariat
Tel: +266 52 01 00 18 | E-mail: samrawitgetaneh@africa-union.org |
Maseru, Kingdom of Lesotho

Notes to Editors:

The African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) is an African Union Organ mandated to monitor the implementation of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) as well as promote and protect children’s rights in Africa. Following the entry into force of the Charter on November 29, 1999, the Committee was established in July 2001, in accordance with Article 32 of the Charter. To date, the Charter has been ratified by 51 of 55 Member States of the African Union. The mandate of the Committee is derived from Articles 32-45 of the Charter and provides among others to undertake research and studies on children’s rights issues.