

## Commemoration of the Day of the African Child in Kenya

Parents, teachers and relatives are the main perpetrators of violence against children. According to Susan Mochache, the principal secretary of social security and services in the Kenyan Ministry of Labour and East Africa Affairs, this fact implies deterioration in family values, hence the need to ensure that functioning families remain at the epicenter of the healthy growth of children. The principal secretary was reading a speech on behalf of the cabinet secretary, Phyllis Kandie, during celebrations to mark the Day of the African Child.

The 2016 Day of the African Child was observed under the theme, “Conflict and Crisis in Africa: Protecting all Children’s Rights.” The theme followed a continent-wide study on the impact of armed conflict on children in Africa, as part of efforts to elevate the child protection agenda in conflict situations, as well as to guarantee the protection and preservation of life and well-being of African children.

To address these challenges, the cabinet secretary’s remarks stated that a multisectoral approach must be undertaken by development agencies to avert violence and to ensure that children grow in a violence-free environment.

All who spoke on the occasion were in agreement that wars and conflicts put children in situations where their rights are violated, including their right to life, their right to live in a family environment, their right to health, their right to education, and their right to survival and development.

“Conflict is the biggest poison in development. In every conflict, it is the children who are vulnerable and bear the greatest brunt of the conflict,” said Dancun Harvey, the country director in Kenya for Save the Children.

The highlights of the day were a procession from the Turkana County Commissioner’s office and the launch of a UNICEF report on understanding and addressing child marriage in Turkana, entitled “Family Assets.” The report identified child marriage as a key child protection issue in Turkana.

The national celebration was conducted in Lodwar in Turkana County in order to highlight child protection issues in the county. The County Government of Turkana was represented by Margaret Kuchar, the county executive committee member in charge of education, human resources development, culture, and social services. She explained that Turkana County is faced with challenges like early marriage, child-headed families due to HIV /AIDS, dilapidated structures and inadequate funding. Poor education facilities in rural areas force parents to send their children to boarding schools. She noted that because of the poor quality of schooling, only 19 percent of pupils in the county transition to secondary schools. In addition, school-going girls often grow apart from their communities and can even be abandoned by their families, who refer to these girls as “children of the government.”

### The six grave violations of children’s rights in times of armed conflict:

- Recruitment and use of children
- Killing and maiming of children
- Sexual violence against children
- Attacks against schools or hospitals
- Abduction of children
- Aerial of humanitarian access

“If only we can listen to our children we can know the great ideas they have for us. A child not educated is a child lost,” Ms. Kuchar said.

The Kenyan government has taken initiatives to protect children by setting up the necessary legal framework through the Constitution of Kenya 2010, Section 53, the Children’s Act of 2001 (which is undergoing amendment) and the social pillar in Vision 2030. Policies have also been created to ensure the rights of children are not violated.

The USAID-funded MEASURE Evaluation PIMA (MEval-PIMA) is supporting the Department of Children’s Services (DCS). MEval-PIMA supports expanding the functionality of the child protection information management system (CPIMS) and the orphans and

vulnerable children (OVC) longitudinal management information system (OLMIS), while building the capacity of relevant stakeholders to use these systems to monitor and evaluate their programs, and to use the data to make programmatic and policy decisions to improve child protection outcomes.

Various partners who attended the Day of the African Child event included the DCS, based within the Ministry of Labour and East Africa Affairs, the National Council for Children's Services, led by Joyce Ngugi, Turkana County government officials, led by the county executive committee for education, human resources development, culture and social services, the county coordinator of children's services from both Nakuru County and Turkana County, UNICEF, led by Jeannette Wijnants, MEval-PIMA, Save the Children, Handicap International, World Vision, The Cradle, International Rescue Committee, ChildFund, the Kenya Red Cross, and local community-based organizations.

## Background

The Day of the African Child has been observed every year since 1991, on June 16, by member states of the African Union (AU) and its partners. This occasion commemorates the 1976 uprisings in Soweto, South Africa, on June 16, when about ten thousand black school children marched in a column more than half a mile long, protesting the poor quality of their education and demanding their right to be taught in their own language.

Hundreds of unarmed young students were shot by police officials. The Day of the African Child further presents an opportunity to focus on the work of all actors committed to the rights of children on the continent and to consolidate their efforts in addressing the obstacles hindering the realization of these rights. The Day of the African Child also provides an occasion for governments, international institutions, and communities to renew their ongoing commitments to improve the lives of children in Africa.