**STATEMENT BY THE COMMUNITY LAW CENTRE, UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE, SOUTH AFRICA TO THE 22ND ORDINARY SESSION OF THE AFRICAN COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE RIGHTS AND WELFARE OF THE CHILD**

**4TH – 8TH NOVEMBER 2013, ADDIS ABABA - ETHIOPIA**

Your Excellency, Commissioner for Social Affairs, African Union Commission;

The Director, Department of Social Affairs, African Union Commission;

Your Excellency, Chairperson of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;

Your Excellencies, Members of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child;

Your Excellencies, Members of the Diplomatic Corps;

Your Excellencies, Representatives of United Nations and African Union Agencies;

Your Excellencies, Heads and Members of State Party delegations here present;

Distinguished Invited Guests;

Distinguished colleagues from civil society organisations;

Ladies and Gentlemen,

All protocol duly and respectfully observed.

I bring you warm felicitations from the Community Law Centre (CLC) of the University of the Western Cape (UWC). Founded 23 years ago, CLC played a pivotal role in shaping South Africa’s return to democratic rule and actively participated in the drafting of the new Constitution, which has been hailed the world over. With a new Constitution in place, CLC did not rest on its oars but continued to support law reform for children, women, prisoners and other incarcerated persons, socio-economic rights and local government. Through engaged research, engaged teaching and advocacy, the Centre has worked through its five focal areas, namely – children’s rights, prisoner’s rights, socio-economic rights, multi-level government and citizen-parliament dialogue to advance the course of human rights and democracy both in South Africa and across the African continent. CLC’s collaboration with the African Committee of Experts and other child-focused organisations is testimony to the Centre’s contribution to the development of children’s rights in Africa. To this end, the Centre is proud to note that two of its Research Fellows – Her Excellency Prof Julia Sloth-Nielsen and His Excellency, Dr Benyam Mezmur are both members of this august Committee.

CLC congratulates the African Committee of Experts for taking bold steps to strengthen its mandate through a number of measures taken to improve its administrative efficiency, such as revising its Rules of Procedure and enhancing its protection mandate through the consideration of more communications and the development if the first-ever General Comment on Article 30 of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child. CLC also acknowledges the commitment of the African Committee of Experts in keeping children’s issues high on the agenda of African Union Member States through the celebration of the Day of the African Child annually.

While CLC commends the African Committee of Experts on these achievements, the Centre also highlights the enormous plight of children on the continent. In South Africa, in particular, the spate of violence against children by adults and in some cases by children themselves is worrying. In February 2013, the nation was shocked to learn of the gang rape and brutal murder of 17 year-old Anene Booysen in Bredasdorp in the Western Cape. Anene was raped, disembowelled and left to die. Barely recovering from the shock, on 15th October 2013, the nation was once again saddened and enraged by the kidnap, rape and murder of the two year-old Yonalisa Mali and her three year-old cousin Zandile Mali in Diepsloot in the Gauteng Province. In between these incidents are endless stories of alleged ‘satanic’ killings and attacks of children by other children, gang-related attacks on children and child abuse by parents and care-givers. These examples are a few too many of the precious lives of our children being lost. Such acts constitute grave violations of articles 5 (protection of the child’s right to life) and 16 (protection from abuse and torture) of the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Although the Centre acknowledges the efforts of the South African Government in stemming the tide of violence against children, the rising rate of the incidents matched against the inadequacy of the preventive and response capacity of the South African Police Service and other security agencies calls for a critical look at the national and provincial framework for the protection of vulnerable groups, particularly children.

As the African Committee of Experts meets in its 22nd Ordinary Session, CLC calls upon the Committee to urge the Government of South Africa – which has committed to submitting its combined Initial and Periodic Report to the Committee soon – to take urgent measures to curb the spate of violent acts against children. CLC consequently requests that the Focal Point of the Committee on violence against children, undertake a country mission to South Africa to interact with national authorities on this menace and find workable and long-lasting solutions to this problem of violence.

Further, CLC calls upon the Committee to prioritise the issue of violence against children not only in South Africa but in other African countries. CLC accordingly urges the African Union to provide the African Committee of Experts with adequate resources to enable it undertake the much-needed country missions by Committee Members to engage with national officials responsible for the protection and promotion of children’s rights to mutually identify ways of addressing challenges faced.

In conclusion, on behalf of CLC, I wish the Committee a productive and fruitful Session and pledge the Centre’s continued support to the Committee in carrying out its mandate.

Thank you for your attention.