

H.E. Moussa Faki Mahamat

AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION (AUC)

CHAIRPERSON

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia

SUBJECT: Urgent action to promote and protect the rights of the blind and partially sighted persons in the African Union and its member states - Covid 19

To His Excellence the Chairperson of the African Union Commission

The African Union of the Blind - AFUB (for short) is a continental body giving a voice to the blind and partially sighted in Africa. AFUB has observer status of the African Union and consular status in Kenya. It was founded by the blind and partially sighted in October 1987 in Tunis Tunisia. It has 53 national members representing the blind and partially sighted in all AU member states. Africa is home to approximately 38 million people who are blind or partially sighted. AFUB hereby encourages the AU and its member states to adopt inclusive and friendly interventions in the face of COVID 19 pandemic.

More often, persons with disabilities particularly the blind and partially sighted face discrimination and exclusion in times of emergencies and disasters. Thereby making them more vulnerable to such calamities. This appeal is underpinned by the principles on the inherent dignity and worth and the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family as the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world as enshrined in the charter of the United Nations as well as the Constitutive Act of the African Union; AFUB is mindful of the fact that the various international instruments including the United Nations Charter, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Human Rights, proclaim and agree that everyone is entitled to the rights and freedoms set forth therein, without discrimination of any kind.

Furthermore we believe that disability is an evolving thematic area and that disability is an interaction between persons with impairments and attitudinal and environmental barriers that hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others. This is also in full recognition and recalling of the African Union's Agenda 2063 Vision of "an integrated, prosperous and peaceful Africa, driven by its own citizens and representing a dynamic force in the global arena". Our request for inclusion in the programs and projects related to the COVID 19 pandemic are directed to the AU and its member states.

We call upon the AU to ensure that persons with disabilities particularly the blind and partially sighted are not ignored, excluded and discriminated against during the fight on the COVID 19 virus and its effects thereto. To this end national response mechanisms including development and social partners, nonstate actors are called upon to provide information on the COVID 19 virus in accessible formats including Braille, audio and large print for blind and partially sighted citizens. Regional and national response mechanisms should train healthcare personnel and other frontline actors for mainstreaming of disability in all their interventions. This includes provision of emergency food packs, entrepreneurship support, education related materials and other social services. These interventions should take on board children, youth and women with disabilities.

The vulnerability and risk of women and girls with disabilities should be of great concern to member states and all the command structures for the fight of COVID 19 virus. All actors should remember to take their interventions to homes where these needy blind and partially sighted reside. Member states should put in place positive messaging including reorientation of the media on the needs of persons with disabilities.

Finally member states should put in place frameworks which recognise the importance of disabled people's organisations. In this regard, frameworks for implementation should work and collaborate with national disabled persons' organisations in the development of policies and measures towards the eradication of COVID 19 virus.

This statement is done in solidarity with all the organizations working in disability worldwide and the disability fraternity in Africa. The African Union of the Blind is affiliated to the World Blind Union whose headquarters are in Toronto Canada.

Respectfully submitted on behalf of AFUB by order of the board

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