**African Union Sport Council**

**Safeguarding in Sport Webinar**

**30 June 2021**

Distinguished participants,

It is a pleasure to participate in this webinar organized by the African Union Sport Council and to contribute to this important discussion on safeguarding in sport in Africa

Sport should always be a positive force in children’s lives. It offers children a way to express themselves, overcome cultural and social exclusion, and maintain their physical and mental wellbeing.

Sport is central to children’s education, socialization and development. It can teach important values such as fair play, team spirit, equality, respect, discipline and tolerance.

Sport can offer a safe haven from harm that children experience in other settings. It can be an anchor of normality and source of resilience for children whose lives are uprooted in other ways, like children in humanitarian settings or children on the move.

In all these ways, sport can contribute to the realization of children’s rights, as set out in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child.

Sport is also a vehicle for promoting peace and development. Sport touches on many of the Sustainable Development Goals, including those related to poverty, health, education, gender equality, social inclusion and building peaceful, just and inclusive societies. The vision of the SDGs is also echoed in Africa’s Agenda for Children 2040 and Agenda 2063.

**But despite the powerful and positive role** that sport plays in many children’s lives, we know there is another side to this. Sadly, children also experience violations of their rights that are associated with sport settings or events.

Children may be exposed to violence or abuse while engaged in sport in the community. Children involved in sport may become the victims of discrimination, sale, trafficking or exploitation.

Mega sporting events can bring displacement, the use of child labour, and the sexual exploitation of children.

Distinguished participants,

**To ensure that sport provides the safe, empowering and nurturing environment that children deserve, it is essential to build a strong safeguarding culture.**

We know that imbalances of power allow impunity and abuse to flourish.

All too often, children’s voices are not heard. Their stories are not believed. They have no reliable channels to report violence that they suffer.

A key function of raising safeguarding and protection standards is to address this imbalance of power. **It is about creating the conditions to empower children, to prevent abuse from happening in the first place and to ensure there is an effective response when cases emerge.**

**Children and key actors involved with sports at all levels must be provided with accessible, child-friendly ways to receive information on how to keep children safe and where to turn for help.**

**Good safeguarding practice also requires an enabling legal framework. But the law cannot solve the problem by itself. Changing organizational cultures requires leadership, innovation, commitment and time. This investment is essential**.

**All those involved in the sporting world – from leadership through to volunteers in the community - must be supported with the knowledge and skills to do the right thing.**

Distinguished participants,

**I welcome the steps** already taken by the African Union in developing an inclusive Policy Framework for the Sustainable Development of Sport in Africa (2008-2018). Member States in the region have also taken the lead in promoting sport as a sustainable, inclusive and peaceful development tool.

**But there is still much work to be done.**

With the global spread of the COVID-19 pandemic and its impacts we are observing a worrying rise in violence against children, in poverty and inequalities affecting mainly the most vulnerable children, threatening their development, mental health and wellbeing

Safe and inclusive Sport is key to accelerate recovery from the pandemic and to build **Sustainable, inclusive, peaceful and resilient societies** keeping children safe while leaving no child behind.

Therefore now, more than ever, we must recognize the increased importance of strong safeguarding standards and the role that States, sports federations and all other stakeholders must play to achieve this

We know what needs to be done. We know how to do it. Now, we must do it.

Thank you