

**STATEMENT AT THE SIGNING CEREMONY FOR THE
MEMORANDUM OF UNDERSTANDING
BETWEEN THE AFRICAN UNION COMMISSION AND
ACTIONAID INTERNATIONAL**

By

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Your Excellency Mrs Rhoda Peace Tumusiime, Commissioner for Rural Economy and Agriculture, African Union Commission, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, all protocols observed and good afternoon.

I bring you greetings on behalf of the International Assembly, Board, Directors and wider ActionAid International Federation and the Africa programme in particular. Today will be remembered in the history of our two organisations as we take the bold step towards signing a very important memorandum of understanding that will form the basis for a much more formalised working relationship between us.

Both the African Union Commission and ActionAid International have their history rooted in the fight against poverty by offering alternatives that can result in improved living standards in the lives of poor and excluded people in the African continent. Established in 1972 and having presence in almost half of the countries in Africa, ActionAid International prides itself by working across multiple geographies at local, national, regional and international levels. Our rootedness in communities over the years has been and remains our biggest strength.

Your Excellency Mme Commissioner, distinguished ladies and gentle, it did take us series of exchanges and negotiations to get to this point, but it was probably worth the wait because it seems to me that the signing of the MoU

we are about to witness, could not have happened at a better time. I say so because on our part, we are on the verge of having our new international strategy approved which will usher ActionAid International into another period of six years (2012-2017) in the fight against poverty. In that strategy, we have clearly articulated our theory of change and the need to work in partnership with institutions such as the AU Commission. Our number one objective during this new strategy period is to

“PROMOTE SUSTAINABLE AGRICULTURE AND CONTROL OVER NATURAL RESOURCES FOR PEOPLE LIVING IN POVERTY”

It is therefore our hope that having an MoU between our two organisations will contribute to our ambition of advancing alternatives, such that we will become respected innovators in developing and testing economically and ecologically just alternatives to commercial over-exploitation of ecosystems and food production, including through agrarian reform, strengthening informal rural economies, agro-ecological farming, seed banks, cooperatives and community forestry.

By working with the AU Commission and others, we will develop compelling proposals to put innovations like these into practice at national, regional and global levels, building on our past learning and action on trade and corporate regulation.

Additionally, the current rise in price of food commodities across the globe and the attendant protests by citizens and CSOs against such trends is further justification for us to work together and fight the common enemy – poverty. We also note with great concern the serious implications of continued land grabs by multi-national corporations at the expense of food production to meet the needs of poor communities; the continued under investments in the sector and the very slow delivery on investment plans by most of our governments. The current drought in the Horn of Africa which is making headlines in the media is already signalling a serious crisis. As we heard in the news today that the Ethiopian Government has now officially requested for

food aid assistance for the populations affected by the drought, we are hopeful that this will send a clear message that we cannot continue to leave in denial anymore and that the time to act is now.

As an organisation, ActionAid International decided to work on food rights as a priority in Africa with a focus on three main processes:

- Sustainable agriculture
- Comprehensive African Agriculture Development Programme (CAADP), and
- Green Revolution

Based on this, we recognised we needed to engage with social movements and CSOs across the continent to build their capacity and facilitate their participation in the above processes. We also recognised that we needed to work even closer with regional institutions so that we can influence their positions by adopting our approach to delivering on sustainable agriculture.

Your Excellency, distinguished ladies and gentlemen, as you may be aware, ActionAid international has been involved in a series of organisation-specific and joint initiatives in advancing our work on food rights in Africa. As part of the Non-State Actors (NSAs) along with others, we already support CSOs around implementation of the CADDP process; we are in the process of signing a contract with the East African Farmers Federation (EAFF) for research on CAADP regional compact; we are planning a CAADP seminar with Oxfam and ACCORD in September 2011; our own critique of CAADP plans is available for wider dissemination and we also have a CAADP toolkit for civil society, organisation, engagement and advocacy.

Let me also mention that one of our urgent plans ahead of the upcoming COP 17 in South Africa is organising discussions on links between climate and agriculture including discussions on climate financing for AU Commission negotiators. We therefore believe that if we are able to get access to AU Commission meetings and their schedule we can prepare policy briefs and help organise seminars/side events etc.

This in addition to our experience, knowledge and rootedness in local communities in Africa and working closely with local organisations gives us legitimacy to do more.

In concluding, I will like to further state the importance of having this MoU with the AU Commission as follows:

- The AU Commission is a space for policy debates and for influencing regional agendas such as CAADP to which its 53 member states in the Africa continent are signed up to;
- It will enable ActionAid International to register and formally attend official AU Commission sessions through which we can influence decisions and policy positions;
- It will help us leverage our political position on major development and poverty-related issues;
- It will enable us to facilitate and push for more engagement by social movements and CSOs with the AU Commission on issues of common interests;
- Lastly as provided for in the MoU, it will also enable both ActionAid International and the AU Commission to agree further areas of work with clear objectives and activities through a joint annual work plan.

I would like to thank Dr. Janet Edeme of the AU Commission for her hard work and continued contact with us, which has culminated to this very important agreement between our two organisations.

I thank you for your attention.

Delivered at: *African Union Commission Headquarters
Addis Ababa, Ethiopia
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15:00hrs. To 16:30hrs
Infrastructure and Energy Committee Room,*

AUC Conference Centre