

"Every child should be registered immediately at birth"

13 - 14 March 2008, N.A. - Addis Ababa, Addis Ababa



PROCEEDING REPORT

OF

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON
REGISTRATION OF VITAL EVENTS WITH
PARTICULAR FOCUS ON BIRTH REGISTRATION
IN ETHIOPIA



unicef



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የተከበራችሁ የኮንፈረንሱ ተከፋዮች

እንደሚታወቀው በልዩ ሁኔታ በሕግ ከልተደነገገ በቀር የሰው ልጆች ሰብአዊ በመሆናቸው ያላቸው መብት ሥራ ላይ መዋል የሚጀመረው ሰው ሆነው ተወልደው ወደዚህ ምድር ከመጡበት ጊዜ ጀምሮ በመሆኑ ላይ በልማድም ሆነ በሕግ እምብዛም ልዩነት አይታይም። ከዚህም የተነሳ በብዙ አገሮች መወለድ መብትን የማስፈጸም ተግባር የሚጀምርበት ምእራፍ ሆነ ተደንግጎ ይገኛል። ከዚህ አኳያ ያለው ልዩነት የሚታየው የአንድ አገር ዜጋ የልደት ጊዜ መቼ ነው የሚለው ለማረጋገጥ የተለያዩ ስልቶችን በመጠቀም ላይ።

ይህን ልዩነት ለማጥበብና ማስረጃውንም ይበልጥ ተአማኒ ለማድረግ በአብዛኛው በሰለጠነው አለም የልደትና የሌሎች ተያያዥነት ያላቸው የሕይወት ዘመን ዋና ዋና ክስቶች ቋሚ ሥርዓትና ደንብ ወጥቶላቸው ሲመዘገቡና ለዜጎች ማስረጃ ሲሰጥ ይታያል። የዚህ ሥርዓት መዘርጋት ለዜጎች መብቶቻቸውን እንዲያስከብሩም ሆነ ግደታቸው እንዲወጡ በትክክለኛ ማስረጃነት ከማገልገል ባሻገር መንግስታት ዜጎቻቸውን በሚመለከቱ ተጨባጭ ማስረጃዎች ላይ ተንተርሰው ኢኮኖሚያዊና ማህበራዊ ችግሮችን በትክክል ሊፈቱ የሚያስችሉ ፖሊሲዎችንና ንፋቴዎችን እንዲቀርጹና እንዲተገብሩ በማስቻል ረገድ ያላቸው ጠቀሜታም የላቀ ነው።

በአገራችንም ልደት፣ ጋብቻና ሞት የመሳሰሉ ኩነቶችን የመመዘገብና የማስመዘገብ ግደታ በ1950ቹ መጀመሪያ በፍትሐ - ብሔር ሕጎችን እንዲወጣ ቢደረግም ለሁኔታዎች አለመሟላት አፈፃፀሙ እንዲቆይ በመደረጉ በትለልቅ ከተሞች አካባቢ ማዘጋጃ ቤቶች በራሳቸው የውስጥ አሠራር ባወጡት ደንቦች ላይ ተመስርተው ወጥነት በሌለው መልክ በተወሰኑ ከተሞች አካባቢ እንዲተገብሩት ሆኖ ቆይቷል።

ከቅርቡ ጊዜ ወዲህ በሥራ ላይ ያሉ ነባር ሕጎቻችንን እየገባን ካለነው ዲሞክራሲያዊ ሥርዓት ጋር ለማጣጣም በተደረገው እንቅስቃሴ ተሻሽለው በመጡት የቤተሰብና የወጀል ሕግ የእነዚህን ኩነቶች ምዝገባ ሥራ ላይ መዋልን የግድ የሚሉ ድንጋጌዎች ቢከተቱም ይህን ሥርዓት በብሔራዊ ደረጃ ለመዘርጋት የሚያስችል ሕግ ለማውጣት ተጀምሮ የነበገው እንቅስቃሴ ከፍጹሙ ባለመድረሱ በሕጎቹ ውስጥ የተከተቱን መብቶች ሙሉ በሙሉ ማረጋገጥ አልተቻለም።

በመሆኑም የእነዚህ ኩነቶች ምዝገባ ሥርዓት በአገራችን መዘርጋት በአቀጣላይ የህዝብ ብዛትና ምንነት መረጃን በየዓመቱ ለማስላትና መንግስት በማህበራዊና ኢኮኖሚ

ዘርፍ የምዕተ ዓመቱን የልማት ግቦች ለማሳካት የሚያደርገውን እንቅስቃሴዎች ለመለከት በጥሩ መረጃ ምንጭነት ከማገልገሉም በላይ የነገው አገር ተረካቢ የሆኑትን ሕፃናት ካላቸው መብቶች አንዱና ዋናኛ የሆነውን ልደት ምዝገባን ሥራ ላይ በማዋል አገሪቱ ያፀደቃቸውን የተባበሩት መንግሥታት የሕፃናት መብት ስምምነትን፣ የአፍሪካ የሕፃናት መብትና ነፃነት ቻርተርንና በሕግ መንግሥታችን እውቅና የሰጠናቸውን የሕፃናት መብቶች ሥራ ላይ ከማዋል አኳያ ወሳኝ ድርሻ ይኖረዋል።

ይህም ሀገር አቀፍ ኮንፈረንስ ከዚህ አኳያ እስከሁን በአገራችን ሲደረግ በነበረው የተበታተነ እንቅስቃሴ የተገኙትን ውጤቶችና ያጋጠሙትን ችግሮች እንዲሁም በአህጉርና በአለም አቀፍ ደረጃ ያሉትን የሌሎች አገሮች ልምድ በመፈተሽ መንግስት ወደፊት ለመዘርጋት ላሰበውና እንቅስቃሴውም በስፋት ለተጀመረው የልደትና የሌሎች ወሳኝ ኩነቶች የምዝገባ ሥርዓት ጥሩ ግብዓት እንደሚሆን ሙሉ እምነት አለኝ።

በመጨረሻ ኮንፈረንሱ በይፋ መጀመሩን እያበስርኩና ዓላማውም የተሳካ እንዲሆን ያለኝን ምኞት በድጋሚ እየረለጽኩ ከኢትዮጵያ ስብአዊ መብቶች ኮሚሽን ጋር በመሆን ይህን ጠቃሚ ጉባኤ ማዘጋጀት መልካም ጥረትና አስተዋጽኦ ላደረጉ መንግሥታትና መንግሥታዊ ያልሆኑ አካላትና አለም አቀፍ ድርጅቶች በኢትዮጵያ ፊደራላዊ ሪፑብሊክ መንግሥትና በራሴ ስም ላመሰግን እወዳለሁ።

አመስግናለሁ

ግርማ ወ/ጊዩርጊስ
የኢትዮጵያ የፊደራላዊ ዲሞክራሲያዊ ሪፑብሊክ ኘሬዝዳንት

Proceeding Report

The programme of the Conference consists of a welcoming address by the Chief Commissioner of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission. Then the Minister of Women's Affairs, Officer-in-Charge of UNICEF, Executive Director of the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF), Country Director of plan Ethiopia and children's representative make keynote addresses. Then follows the opening address by the president of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia. Before the Conference breaks for coffee/tea, The Executive Director of the ACPF make a presentation on the Concept, Significance and status of Birth Registration (BR) and the progress of universal BR in the Region. After coffee/tea break, a consultant presents the findings of the survey on perception and practice of BR in Ethiopia followed by another presentation on the Initiatives, Challenges and prospects of Vital Registration and Statistics in Ethiopia, by the Head of vital statistics Department of the Central Statistics Agency (CSA). Just before lunch, some time is allocated for discussion.

The afternoon session begins with a presentation on the Experience from the second Eastern and Southern Africa conference on universal BR by the Child Right programme Advisor of plan Regional Office for Eastern and Southern Africa. This is followed by another presentation on Asian and African Experience on Universal BR by the Child Rights officer of UNICEF. After the afternoon coffee/tea break, some time is allocated to discuss issues raised by the two presentations.

The second day of the Conference starts with a presentation by an Assistant professor from the Addis Ababa University of a Synopsis on the Ethiopian Law of Civil Registration. This is followed by another presentation by the Head of Vital Statistics Department of CSA on Concepts, Principles and Instruments for the Establishment of Vital Registration and Statistics Systems in Ethiopia. After the morning coffee/tea break, some time is allocated for discussion on the two presentations. After the discussion, the plenary breaks into three groups to discuss the progress, challenges and prospects of model vital registration Programme in Southern Nations, Nationalities and peoples (SNNP), Amhara and Tigray regional states. After the afternoon coffee/tea break, each group briefly reports back through their

rapporteur, their discussion to the plenary. Some time is again allocated to comment and ask questions on the reports of the group discussion. For the Way Forward: Scaling up Vital Registration in Ethiopia, the Conference comes up with a Resolution that recommends follow-up actions to the Conference. The Commissioner for Children's and Women's Rights of the Human Rights Commission then gives a closing remark before the National Conference is brought to an end.



Monday, 13 March 2006

Dr Bulti started by welcoming the president Gitma W/Giorgis of Ethiopia Minister Hirut Delebo of Women's Affairs, Chief Commissioner Ambassador Kassa GebreHiwot of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission, representatives from UN agencies and international organizations, representatives for regions, children and other participants to the Conference on behalf of the organizers. He informed the Conference is attended by government officials, UN agencies, international organizations, federal and regional governmental institutions, children, research institutions, among others. He then introduced the agenda of the day. He added that different organizations and institutions are invited to give keynote addresses in relation to their respective responsibility towards birth registration. He then called upon H.E. Ambassador Kassa Gebre Hiwot to give a welcoming address.

H.E. Ambassador Kassa Gebre Hiwot, Chief Commissioner of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

“Ethiopia recognizes human rights in its Constitution and has ratified various international human rights instrument. Some of these include a provision that requires the registration of a child immediately at birth and provides for the right to nationality.”



Welcoming Address

H.E. Ambassador Kassa Gebre Hiwot, Chief Commissioner of the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission

Ambassador Kassa first welcomed the President, all dignitaries and participants to the National Conference. He noted that Ethiopian recognizes human rights in its Constitution and has ratified various international human rights instrument. Some of these include a provision that requires the registration of a child immediately at birth and provides for the right to nationality. The UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) provides in its article 7 for the right to birth registration, a name and nationality. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) further provides for the same rights. Both the CRC and ACRWC provide that State Parties should report on the status of birth registration in their respective countries. For this, it is critical that a birth registration system be established both at federal and regional levels. For this purpose the Civil Code of 1960 provides for the legal framework. However due to the absence of the required institutional structure, BR has not been implemented in Ethiopia.

However, the Chief Commissioner added, this cannot be delayed anymore as this has various impact and consequences on a number of issues, the main one being the non-realization of the rights of children. BR is also instrumental for the planning and implementation of different policies and development strategies.

He then referred to the Regional Conference on Universal BR that was held in Mombassa in September 2005 that identified Ethiopia as one of the few countries where there is no BR system. He noted that the Justice System Reform Programme, the Revised Family Law and penal Code recognize the significance and importance of vital registration. Ethiopia has also

drafted other necessary policy documents and legislations to enable the full realization of birth legislations system. The draft legislation on vital registration is tabled to the parliament and is being discussed. The model programme being undertaken in three regional states will enable the responsible office to identify the challenges and prospects in establishing a vital registration system.

In the end, he thanked the task force that was established after the Regional Conference in Mombassa for organizing this National Conference.

The facilitator, Dr Bulti Gutema, thanked the Chief Commissioner and called on Minister Hirut Delebo to make the first keynote address.

H.E. Hirut Delebo, Minister of Women's Affairs

“BR is also instrumental for the elimination of early marriage, ensuring care and guidance of children by their parents, voting rights, protection of juvenile delinquents, etc. ... BR is part and parcel of fundamental human rights.”



Keynote address

H.E. Hirut Delebo, Minister of Women's Affairs

She started by welcoming the President, other dignitaries and participants to the Conference. She then recognized that BR plays a major role in the development process of the country. Ethiopia also needs to implement the duties it has entered into by ratifying international human rights conventions. BR is important in recognizing the existence and nationality of people. BR is also instrumental for the elimination of early marriage, ensuring care and guidance of children by their parents, voting rights, protection of juvenile delinquents, etc. she stressed that BR is part and parcel of fundamental human rights. However, she noted that only 50% of children are registered in the world. Furthermore, except for few countries, BR is not effectively implemented in Africa.

She stressed the need for preparation to be able to implement an effective BR System in Ethiopia. All relevant stakeholders should coordinate their efforts towards an effective BR system. In Ethiopia, due to lack of resources BR has not become a reality. However, religious institutions and municipalities are trying their best to fill in the gap. BR is important in the planning and implementation of development programmes, in addition to the respect of citizen's rights. She concluded by reconfirming the commitment of the Ministry in this endeavor.

After thanking the Minister, Dr Bulti called upon Mr. Bruno Maes, the Officer-in-Charge of UNICEF to make the second keynote address.

Mr. Bruno Maes, Officer-in-Charge, UNICEF

“The child who does not have a birth certificate, does not have the document that would enable him to get health services, enroll in school, have a passport/travel document, etc. ...UNICEF advocates for a free and effective BR that is universal, compulsory, permanent and continuous.”



Keynote address

Mr Bruno Maes, officer-Charge, UNICEF

He started by welcoming the President, Minister of Women’s Affairs, Chief commissioner, other dignitaries, children and participants. He then noted that the CRC provides that the child shall be registered immediately at birth, given a name, and cared for by his/her parents. BR is a permanent and official record of the existence of the child. The child who is not registered at birth risks being shut off from many rights and services. The child who does not have a birth certificate, does not have the document that would enable him to get health services, enroll in school, have a passport/travel document, etc. Mr Bruno added that in the absence of BR, children might not be protected from early marriage, trafficking, labour exploitation, etc. He further noted that the absence of a BR system goes beyond the individual. The country will not be able to plan and implement development strategies and programmes effectively. UNICEF advocates for a free and effective BR that is universal, compulsory, permanent and continuous.

He recalled that UNICEF is funding the model vital registration programme in Tigray, Amahara and SNNP. In other counties, UNICEF also supports advocacy and awareness raising activities, in addition to capacity building to

enable the effective implementation of a BR system. It also supports integrated projects of BR with, for instance, immunization

Mr. Bruno ended his address by stating that though BR is not by itself a guarantee for the respect of human rights, its absence opens doors for the violations of a number of child rights. Child trafficking, early marriage, illegal adoption, child labour are some of the consequences of lack of BR.

The facilitator thanked Mr. Bruno and called on Dr Assefa Bequele, Executive Director of the African Child Policy Forum.

Assefa Bequele (PhD), Executive Director, The African Child Policy Forum



“Man is central to human development. Without nurturing and galvanizing man, there will be no sustainable development. The material needs of man are not the only needs that should be met. The intrinsic value of the individual is important. The basic needs of man and the respect of the dignity of the person should be respected equally.”

Keynote address

Assefa Bequele (PHD), Executive Director, The African Child Policy Forum

Dr Assefa started by apologizing for not speaking in Amharic as he prepared his keynote address in English. He then thanked the President, Minister of Women’s Affairs, Chief Commissioner, representatives of UN agencies and international organizations, Children and other participants and said he is honored to be part of this Conference. As he is expected to speak extensively on the progress of BR in the region later on and because of the preceding addresses, he will refrain from taking too much time and rather focus on the organization of the Conference.

He noted that fundamental to the respect and protection of child rights is the existence of the law on BR. Because of that, the ACPF considers BR a priority area in the work of child rights. Thanks to Plan Ethiopia, the ACPF has undertaken a survey on perception and practice of BR in Ethiopia. The report of the survey is the main document of this conference. He informed the Conference that the findings of the survey will be shared with the participants later on in the day.

He further stated that ensuring BR is primarily a state responsibility. The federal and regional authorities are the main actors in the implementation of these rights. Moreover, parents, religious leaders, the community at large are also responsible.

He added that it would be amiss if we do not recognize the work of Plan Ethiopia in the area of BR. Plan brought the issue of BR to the global agenda.

He noted his concern at the gap in the implementation of BR. He further mentioned that man is central to human development. Without nurturing and galvanizing man, there will be no sustainable development. The material needs of man are not the only needs that should be met. The intrinsic value of the individual is important. The basic needs of man and the respect of the dignity of the person should be respected equally. For this purpose, it is extremely important that we depoliticize human rights. Dr Assefa then asked how we can develop this culture of human rights in Africa? Where does this culture of human rights begin? He suggested a solution by putting children first when budgeting the national resources. The community should further put pressure on the Government to allocate adequate resources for children. We also need to ask what the status of children is within the community. Parents should further reconsider the status of children within the family. Their voices need to be heard in the family and community. He ended his keynote address by thanking the participants of the Conference.

After thanking Dr Assefa, Dr Bulti called on Mr Santiago Bernal, Country Director of Plan Ethiopia to give the next keynote address.

Mr Santiago Bernal, Country Director,
Plan Ethiopia

“The bearer of the right to BR is the child, while the state is the primary duty bearer in establishing an effective BR system in the country.”



Keynote address

Mr. Santiago Bernal, Country Director, Plan Ethiopia

He started by welcoming the President, Minister of Women’s Affairs, Chief Commissioner, honorable representatives form regional states and city administrations, UN agencies, ACPF, distinguished participants and children. He noted his delight to be part of this Conference. He further thanked the organizers, Ministry of Women’s Affairs, the Central Statistics Agency, ANPPCAN, ACPF, UNICEF and Plan.

He confirmed the renewal of Plan’s commitment to support Ethiopia in the realization of the right to BR. He also officially launched the Survey on Perception and Practice of BR in Ethiopia conducted by Plan and the ACPF.

Mr. Santiago further noted that BR is recognized by a number of international human right instruments, including the CRC. Despite some efforts over the years, he stated that there is no official system of BR in Ethiopia. He also reconfirmed that BR is instrumental to various rights, including the right to name, nationality, health care, education, juvenile justice administration, etc.

He added that the bearer of the right to BR is the child, while the state is the primary duty bearer in establishing an effective BR system in the country. Accessibility to all citizens should be ensured and allocation of the necessary resources reconsidered. The Ethiopian Government should consider BR as a priority. Mr. Santiago ended his keynote address by observing that the level of

participation to this Conference shows the commitment to make BR a reality in Ethiopia.

The facilitator, Dr.Bulti thanked Mr. Santiago and called upon one of the children's representatives to make the last keynote address.

Children's Representative

“Lack of BR makes the administration of juvenile justice, family reunification and issuance of proper identity and travel documents difficult.”



Keynote address

Children's Representative

The Children's Representative started by welcoming the participants and thanking the organizers of this Conference. The child then observed that BR has not been implemented in Ethiopia. Despite the law that provides for BR, the necessary structure to make it operational had not been established yet. Because of that, noted the child, children cannot adequately be protected from various forms of abuse, such as early marriage, trafficking and child labour. Lack of BR makes the administration of juvenile justice, family reunification and issuance of proper identity and travel documents difficult. The impact of the absence of BR is not limited to the individual rights. It affects the nation's development strategies and programmes.

The child thus ended by forwarding the following recommendations to make BR a reality on behalf of all children. Some of the recommendations were:

- Raise the awareness of the community to register all children immediately at birth;
- Enact the necessary legislation;
- Implement BR;
- Make BR accessible to all children in Ethiopia; and
- Use the mass media to create awareness on BR.

The facilitator then called the commissioner to invite the President, Girma W/Giorgis, to give the opening address after thanking the Children's Representative.



“BR is critical to assess the progress of Ethiopia towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is also important to recognize the existence of children immediately at birth and for the protection of their rights.”

Opening address

President Girma W/Giorgis of the Federal Democratic Republic of Ethiopia

The President started by reaffirming that in principle all human beings are equal from the day of their birth and BR is important to ensure the existence of a person. BR is also important to enable citizens to exercise their rights and perform their duties.

He continued by taking note of the section in the Civil Code that provides for BR that was not implemented due to various reasons. He then appreciated the efforts of municipalities and churches for filling in the gap by issuing birth certificates until an effective BR is established. He reconfirmed that the Revised Family Law and Penal Code further provide for BR. However, in the absence of the necessary institutional framework, the provisions could not be implemented.

The President noted that BR is critical to assess the progress of Ethiopia towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). It is also important to recognize the existence of children immediately at birth and for the protection of their rights. He informed that this national Conference will discuss the status of BR in Ethiopia and the challenges and problems that Ethiopia will face in implementing BR. With this note, he declared the National Conference on Registration of Vital Events open and together with the Human Right

Commission thanked all the organizations involved in the organization of this Conference.

Following this, the President and Minister of Women's Affairs left the conference hall to attend to other matters. The facilitator, Ms. Krista Krufft from Plan Ethiopia, then invited Dr Assefa Bequele to make his presentation.

Concept, Significance and Status of Birth Registration and Universal Birth Registration--Progress in the Region, Dr Assefa Bequele, Executive Director, the ACPF

He started by informing the participants that his presentation was initially prepared for the Regional Conference on Universal BR held on Mombassa, in September 2005 and stated that he would like children to be his main audience.

He noted that the ACPF works on pan-African issues and is a knowledge based child rights advocacy organization. One of the organization's work focuses on BR. He, however, noted that his presentation will focus on the situation of BR in the region as Ato Yoseph Endashaw will focus on the findings of the survey undertaken on BR in Ethiopia.

He started his presentation by quoting Harry Belafonte who said, "For children to count, they have to be counted". He then defined BR as the official recording of a child's birth by the state and a permanent and official record of a child's existence. He noted that international instruments provide for BR. However the practice in Africa is far from that. Though the birth of children in Africa is considered as a big event, registration of children is alien to Africans. During the colonial period, he continued, BR was only implemented on citizens of the colonial powers and Asians. However, after independence, BR became universal.

The CRC and ACRWC provide for BR. The CRC states the child shall be registered immediately at birth, ect. The ACRWC further reinforces the CRC. While all countries in the world, except for the United States of America and Somalia, have ratified the CRC, some 35 countries out of 52 in Africa have ratified the ACRWC. Despite this, while in industrialized countries only 2% of children are not registered, in Africa 55% of births go unrecorded.

The CRC also provides, Assefa continued, that the child has the right to know and be cared for by his/her parents. This provision enables adopted children to know their natural parents. In addition, the ACRWC provides for nationality according to the law of the soil. This allows stateless children especially refugee, nomad and displaced children to have nationality of the country where they are born.

Moreover, BR serves as a door to a range of rights including education and health. In some counties, a child who does not have a birth certificate (BC) may not be able to enroll in a school, get health services, etc. The demand for BR is becoming more pressing in many countries. For instance, he said, in Somaliland the administrative, legal, civic and political needs are calling for a BR system.

On the other hand, BR is instrumental for combating age-related abuse and exploitation, such as child labour, child trafficking, child marriage and recruitment into armed forces. Juvenile justice administration is another area where BR is critical.

Assefa then identified some of the obstacles to BR. These are:

- lack of awareness of the importance BR;
- fear of abuse and persecution of certain group of population;
- incompatibility with local values;
- registration may be costly for the poor.

In preparing for the establishment of an effective BR system, certain countries are taking some actions, for instance in Lesotho, they are consolidating and rationalizing the authority towards an effective BR system. In Ethiopia, a national plan of action is formulated, while in Uganda, they are scaling up the system through decentralization of power and using community based organizations.

Before bringing his presentation to an end, he recommended the following ways forward for a BR that is universal, free and compulsory:

- a legislative framework;
- an institutional framework for implementation;
- sufficient allocation of resources;
- political will;
- necessary awareness of the community.

At this point, the facilitator broke the session for 20 minutes coffee/tea break.

Second session

The session resumed at 11:30. The first presentation of the second session was by Ato Yoseph Endashaw.

Survey on Perception and Practice on BR in Addis Ababa and the Regional States of Oromia, Amhara and SNNPR, Yoseph Endashaw, Consultant

He started by sharing the aim of the survey, which is to develop a comprehensive understanding on BR and propose a way forward for a fully function BR system. He then listed down the objectives as follows:

- To identify issues related to BR, such as the perception, practices, policy and legal framework, impact of absence of BR, etc.
- To identify the needs, problems, strengthens, weaknesses, threats and opportunities from stakeholders' perspective; and
- To propose a feasible and sound solution for the establishment of a BR system in Ethiopia through a multi-stakeholder approach.

The Survey was undertaken form Sept-Dec 2005 and used both quantitative and qualitative methods to collect data from primary and secondary sources. The Survey used 581 informants (346 males and 235 females) in total from 48 geographical locations. It was undertaken in Addis Ababa, and the regional

states of Oromia, SNNPR and Amhara. Urban and rural children were also involved in the survey.

Ato Yoseph summarized the findings of the Survey as follows:

- **Assessment of policy and legal framework**

The Survey looked into international, regional and national instruments that provide for BR. Ethiopia has made international instruments that it has ratified, including the CRC and ACRWC, an integral part of its Constitution. Though the Constitution of Ethiopia does not provide specifically for BR, it provides for rights related to BR, such as the rights to know and be cared for by one's parents. These rights, he stressed, should be construed in light of the CRC and ACRWC.

The efforts to establish a BR system in Ethiopia started during the reign of Menelik. The 1960 Civil Code then provides for detailed and comprehensive rules on civil registration. The Civil Code appears to have envisaged for a fully functional BR system. However, the Civil Code includes a transitory provision, which made the implementation of these provisions conditional on an order to be published. This order was never published. Therefore the BR system has never been operationalized.

Furthermore, the 1957 and the Revised Penal codes deal with offences related to BR. Breach of duties of officials, omission to register a child at birth, false registration are considered as offences related to BR. However, these provisions were never implemented because the BR system was never operationalized.

Proclamation No. 104/1976 and No. 206/1981 were the other two pieces of legislation that dealt with BR. These proclamations granted the powers and duties to keep the register of birth, death and marriage to kebeles. Directives were to be issued detailing how kebeles should keep these records. However, these directives failed to be issued rendering the proclamations non-effective.

The National Population Policy of Ethiopia further prioritizes the enactment of a legislation that makes the registration of vital events compulsory. It also grants the responsibility to establish a nationwide system of vital registration to the National Office of Population.

Moreover, the National Plan of Action for Children identifies registration of children in most urban centers as one of the activities that will improve the situation of children who face abuse and exploitation. This limits the extent of BR to only some of the urban centers.

The Revised Family Law of 2000 further underlines the importance of civil registration as a means of proof of status and states that a law should be issued to establish the necessary institutional arrangement for civil registration within six months. However, though six years has gone by since the Revised Family Law has been enacted, the detailed law on civil registration is not yet enacted.

Currently, there is a Draft Proclamation to provide for establishing the Central Office for Registration of vital Events and Organization of Vital Events Registration System that is being discussed in the House of peoples' Representatives. The Draft is basically based on the 1960 Civil Code with significant changes made to the institutional structure taking into consideration the prevailing administrative structure of the country.

In conclusion, though BR is a fundamental right of Children there is a complete absence of BR system in Ethiopia.

- **Perception on BR**

Ato Yoseph continued that the survey further assessed the awareness of individual and institutions of BR as a fundamental right. He noted that there is no marked difference in awareness level on BR as a fundamental right between the sexes and respondents from different regions. He added that the

survey found out that there is little understanding of BR as a right by itself. Most respondents, especially children, do not consider BR instrumental for the protection of other rights, development of policy and budget allocation. The awareness on the significance of BR is limited. NGOs seemed to be more knowledgeable in this aspect.

- **The practice related to BR**

Ato Yoseph reinforced that there is no formal BR system in Ethiopia. Municipalities, churches, hospitals, idirs and Kebeles, therefore, incidentally register birth. However, these are far from being universal, compulsory, permanent and continuous. These registers are also not collected systematically and are not used for statistical purposes.

There is a clear distinction between BR and birth certificate (BC), Ato Yoseph added. The latter is a mere evidence of birth on which information gathered during birth registration is copied. However, in Ethiopia certificate is issued based on information gathered not through birth registration but other mechanisms, such as baptism, hospital delivery, 8th grade certificate, vaccination cards, etc.

The practice is therefore open for abuse and error. The fee for the issuance of a birth certificate by different institutions is sometimes high and unreasonable. Information indicated on certificates from different institutions is also not identical.

The Survey has shown that there are few people in Ethiopia who have BC as these are not required to assert legal rights. People seek BC for traveling outside the country, admission in a private school, and adoption.

In the absence of an effective BR, other means of verification such as medical examination, 8th grade certificate, vaccination cards, personal observation and identity cards are used.

- **Impact of the absence of BR system**

Ato Yoseph noted that the absence of BR is affecting the realization of the rights of children. Vulnerable children are the most affected. It excludes children from enjoying their social, economic, civil, political and cultural rights, It further exposes children to various types of abuse, exploitation and maltreatment, such as trafficking, child labour, early marriage, etc. The absence of BR also seriously affects the administration of juvenile justice system. It has resulted in planning and implementing development programmes and projects affecting children based on less reliable demographic data.

Lack of BR further affects the work of many institutions. It also affects the interest of the public and entails danger to national security.

- **Stakeholders analysis and review of practical initiatives**

As Ato Yoseph ran out of time, he briefly listed the stakeholders to this issue to include policy makers, demographic and statistics authorities, sector offices, such as the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, etc, international and local NGOs, relevant UN agencies, community and religious institutions, etc. He then stated one of the opportunities identified by stakeholders is the recognition of BR as a fundamental right, while the challenges are the low level of awareness and lack of political will.

He finished his presentation by briefly enumerating some of the ongoing efforts towards a BR system in Ethiopia. These include the legislative process in the Parliament, the surveys and studies undertaken, the production of information, education and communication materials and manuals, the implantation of pilot programmes and the establishment of regional steering committee in the Amhara region. He concluded that:

- There is no formal BR system in Ethiopia;
- There is no legislation to establish a BR system :
- There is little awareness on BR;
- There are many institutions that are willing to participate in the implementation of BR system in Ethiopia.

He then recommended that:

- At the international level, BR should be incorporated and prioritised in relevant policies, engaged in advocacy, and provided support;
- At the national level, there should be political will, the legislation should be enacted, resources should be allocated, the responsible institution should be established, etc.
- At the civil society/community level: lobbying and advocacy for establishment of a BR system should be undertaken; and create awareness.

The facilitator, Ato Dawit Mekuria thanked Ato Yoseph and called upon Ato Genene to give his presentation.

Vital Registration and Statistics in Ethiopia: Initiatives, Challenges and Prospects, Ato Genene Bizuneh, Central Statistics Agency (CSA)

Ato Genene started by clarifying that vital registration includes Br. The occurrence of vital events is recognized through registration. Though religions institutions carry out registration of some vital events, the recording is done according to the respective religion.

Historically, he added that modern civil registration was recognized since Napoleon's time, while the actual practice of registration of civil events started in England in the 16th century in relation to prevention of epidemics.

He pointed out that defining the different terms related to vital registration is essential to have a common understanding during discussion and implementation of registration of vital events. Different legal and technical documents have used different terminologies to refer to the same things. There is a need to clarify this in the future.

He further noted that the UN Division of Statistics have included ten events as vital. These are live birth, fetal death, death, marriage, divorce, annulment of marriage, legal separation, adoption, legitimization, and recognition. The UN further priorities four of these events; live birth, death, marriage and divorce. These are the four vital events that are given priority in Ethiopia.

Ato Genene then described why we need registration of vital events in Ethiopia. It is because:

- They are fundamental rights. For instance BR is recognized as a fundamental right in the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, the CRC, the Construction and the Civil Code. On the other hand, registration of marriage and divorce for instance, is essential for the protection of women's rights. These are recognized in the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, the Convention on Consent to Marriages. Minimum Age for Marriage and Registration of Marriage, the Revised Family Law.

- It is instrument to the protection and respect of human rights, such as the right to a name and nationality, the right to know one's parents, health services, parental care, administration of juvenile justice, education, shelter, employment, movement, vote and be elected, and be protected from early marriage.
- It is important for a modern and efficient justice system. For instance, the importance and significance of vital registration is incorporated in the Justice System Reform Programme, the federal and religion revised family laws, and the Civil Code.
- It is further essential for the establishment of a modern and equitable administration and social service system. This will enable the issuance of identity card, passport, determination of age for school enrollment, conclusion of legal marriage, election, administration of land, administration of commerce and service sector, immunization and mother and child care, disease control, family planning, health and epidemiology research, etc.
- It is important for updated, continuous and adequate information on population growth. This will assist in the retrieval of familial and social data for service providing institutions, monthly and quarterly report on populations behaviors, population estimates, projection, growth rate, and indicators. It will also assist in assessing the progress towards the MDGs. Since population census is undertaken every 10 years, projection is done based on registration of vital events.

Ato Genene enumerated the different initiatives taken towards a nationwide vital registration in Ethiopia as follows:

- The CSA together with regional institutions are implementing model vital registration programme in three regional states for a year and a half.
- A draft legislation has been prepared and is being discussed in the Parliament.
- A Survey on Perception and Practice of BR is undertaken.
- Studies have been undertaken on the collection, maintenance and management of vital statistics.
- Information, education and communication materials are produced to raise awareness on vital registration.
- A draft plan of action is prepared.

He then went on to briefly summarize the reason why a vital registration has not been implemented in Ethiopia. One of the reasons is the fact that we are caught up by culture practices that are in conflict with vital registration. There is also a tendency of looking for indirect shortcut to technical system and of not adjusting to innovative models to the country's circumstance. Finally. There is lack of endurance, by not keeping up with the momentum.

Ato Genene ended his presentation by listing down the opportunities that would enable the establishment of a vital registration in Ethiopia. The decentralized system of the country; the fact that most development policies and social services and strategies require vital statistics at the lower administration; the technical preparation already underway; the availability of information technology that is cost effective and assists in the management of data; and the fact that accurate statistical data are required to asses the progress towards the MDGs are some of the opportunities for the implementation of BR system in Ethiopia.

At the end of Ato Genene's presentation, the Conference broke for lunch.

Afternoon session

The session resumed at 14:10 to discuss the two presentations that were made before the Conference broke for lunch. The facilitator, Ato Dawit Mekuria, opened the session for comments and questions after summarizing the main topics addressed in the last two presentations.

The first participant addressed his question to Ato Yoseph and asked the extent to which the level of awareness on BR is low. He also wanted to know the number of people who have a birth certificate. Another participant asked whether the Survey should be that there is no BR System in the country or that the practices is rather traditional. For instance, churches register birth, though it might not meet the criteria of an effective BR system. Furthermore, the Survey should mention the initiatives

taken by the CSA through the model programme on vital registration so that the findings of the survey do not disregard the work of the CSA.

Yet another participant from Benishengul-Gumuz noted that he was expecting the findings of the Survey to differ from region to region. In some regions, there are cultural practices that go against BR. For instance, in some areas a child is not given a name until he has lived a certain period of time or gone through a culture ceremony. This, he added, should be mentioned as a challenge to BR system.

Another participant recalled that the findings of the Survey showed that one of the challenges for the establishment of a BR system in Ethiopia is lack of political will. However, draft legislation is already tabled for the parliament, which shows the commitment of the Government to BR. She said that the main problem is rather the lack of administration system at the grass root level. She asked the reason why the Survey failed to mention this.

A participant from the SNNPR questioned the scope of the survey and whether the sample taken is considered to be representative of the country.

Ato Yoseph replied to the questions raised in the following manner:

- There is no accurate statistics for the number of people who have a BC. The Survey showed that among the 107 children respondents, only 22% have a BC. They only got the BC because they needed it and not as a result of registration of their birth.
- BR and BC are two different things. There is a practice of issuing BC by different institutions. But this does not qualify as BR. BR requires a central institution and needs to be compulsory, permanent, continuous and universal. This kind of a system does not exist in Ethiopia. There is a practice of incidental recording and issuing of BC by some institutions. Under normal circumstances, BC should be issued based on the information gathered during birth registration.

- The challenges that some cultural practices in different regions might pose are mentioned in the Survey. However due to lack of time, those were not mentioned in detail during the presentation.
- The Survey mentions lack of political will as one of the challenges because stakeholders identified it as such. Respondents also identified the decentralization of power as one opportunity to implement BR in Ethiopia. Though there might be some challenges at the beginning, especially in the remote areas we should start somewhere and proceed accordingly.
- The scope is limited due to resources and time constraints. Though the Africa Child Policy Forum should address this question, it appears that the three regions are selected given their size and population density. Mrs Rakeb Messele who managed the BR project with the ACPF reinforced that due to limitation of resources and time, the scope of the survey had to be limited to three regions.

Ato Genene further added that we can only say that there is a vital registration system, if 90% of vital registration is effected. However, this is not the case in our country. He also noted that the model programme implementation by the CSA is mentioned by the Survey and the challenges faced during their regions will be presented tomorrow. He further pointed out the existence of kebeles is not enough to effectively implement BR in Ethiopia. The system should take into consideration the different cultural practices in the country. With regard to the draft legislation tabled for the Parliament another presentation that will be made tomorrow will discuss it in detail. The Survey identified lack of political will as one challenge considering the time it has taken between the tabling of the draft legislation and its endorsement. Ato Genene added that considering its scope, the Survey can be considered as a situational analysis. The scope of this type of studies is usually limited because of resources.

Amarech Ashenafi from Plan Ethiopia addressed her question to Ato Genene and asked whether the implementation of vital registration require a huge resource.

One of the children's representatives started by thanking the organizers and recommended that the discussion on BR should also be taken to regional level.

Yet another participant noted that registration of birth had been carried out in the past for the purpose of rationing certain items, such as sugar and grains, at the kebele level. Though this practice was not referred as BR, he asked, if this could not serve as a model. He further noted that discussing the reasons why different pieces of legislation enacted in the past have not become operational could help us in assessing the risk in future.

Another participant asked why the Survey did not mention the great successes achieved in Addis Ababa in the last three years. He further noted his concern why the group discussion planned for the next day does not include the practice in Addis Ababa. He pointed out that the certificate that the Addis Ababa Municipality issues is recognized by at the international level. The computerization of the issuance of BC has also enabled the prevention of errors and issuance of different and several certificates to the same person. This service has been made available in 4 areas in Addis Ababa. Why is this practice not considered as a model by the Survey? Couldn't this show the political will of the City Administration?

Ato Genene replied as follows:

- In Ethiopia, we do not need to establish a separation administration system for BR. We will be using the existing one with some adjustment. This and other use of opportunities will enable us to cut down on our cost. The resources available could be thus dedicated to the technical and technology equipments required.
- All regions are represented in this National Conference. Further efforts are also planned to take this discussion at regional level.
- The CSA has been closely working with the Addis Ababa City Administration. There are some gaps in its implementation of vital registration. For instance, birth is not registered within 3 months of its occurrence, and marriage and death are not

registered within 1 month of their occurrence, even following the provisions of the civil code. The registration practice of the administration is far from the recommended timing of the registration of events, which is immediately following their occurrence. Therefore, the recording of the events by the administration will merely be considered as information and not registration. The continuity and universality requirements are also and not fulfilled. However, the Municipality is filling the gaps that are created by the absence of an effective BR system in the country. On the other hand, this by itself is identified as a challenge as this practice reinforces the tendency to rely on indirect shortcuts. The programme that is being implemented by the CSA and UNICEF in three regions is referred to as a model because it is a system of vital registration as recommended by the UN Division of Statistics.

Ato Yospeh stressed that there is a clear distinction between the issuance of BC and BR. The practice of the Addis Ababa City Administration is studied and documented in the Survey. However, the practice remains to be the issuance of BC and not BR. The respondents in Addis Ababa have also expressed their appreciation to the services provided by the Municipality; however the accuracy of the information on the BC is still questionable.

He further noted that the registration of persons within a house by the kebeles for the purpose of rationing foodstuff is also documented in the Survey. This practice led to conclusion that to be effective, BR should be related to the provision of services.

Ato Yoseph recalled that though the Civil Code provided for the registration of vital events, it has included a transitory provision by way of an order to be published because there was an understanding that the institutional capacity was not adequate at the time. However, currently Ethiopia has to some extent the required institutional capability.

Wzo Amarech Ashenafi, the facilitator of the next session called upon Liya and Samuel, two of the children's representatives, to read a poem on BR fort he

participants. After the poem on BR for the thanked the children and called upon Mr. Kimaru Wakararu from Plan Regional Office of Eastern and Southern Africa.

[Experience from the Second Eastern and Southern Africa Conference on Universal BR, Kimaru Wakararu, Child Right Programmed Advisor, Plan, RESA](#)

Mr. Kimaru started by recalling that 168 participants attended the Regional Conference on Universal BR held in September 2005 in Mombassa. Only ten countries from Eastern and Southern Africa attended the First Regional Conference that was held in Uganda, while 21 countries attended the Second Conference.

He pointed out that one of the successes of the Conference is the mixture of the participants. There were high-level government officials, but also technical people such as civil registrars and people involved in advocacy.

He further listed the purposes of a regional conference including to share experience to be the need for partnership in the area of BR as the one with the community; a serious call for action; the need for scaling-up promising practices into good practices; and the limited resources allocated for BR by governments in the sub-region.

At the Regional Conference, Mr. Kimaru recalled that the government agreed that political will need to be merged with the technical capacity on the ground. The community needs to understand the significance of BR and that community mobilization is only possible through the civil society. There is a need for national and regional networks to make this possible.

One of the key issues discussed during the Mombassa Conference, he added, was awareness raising campaign. It was agreed that if people do not understand the importance of BR, the system cannot be effective. The community should first understand what the BR system has to offer, what services are made accessible through BR, etc.

Mr. Kimaru further noted that already some governments in the sub-region have started to address these questions. Some have shown their commitment by enacting the necessary legislation (Egypt), putting in place a subsidized service, computerized the BR system (Botswana), undertook studies and implement model programme based on concrete data (Ethiopia), etc.

Partnership is one issue that need to be addressed especially at the grass root level. Malawi and Madagascar have good experience in this area. Reaching the most remote areas is another challenge. Angola, Swaziland, Uganda, Ethiopia and Zambia have some experience in this regard.

Moreover, Mr. Kimaru pointed out that Plan has worldwide experience in BR. For instance,

- Plan Albania has similar experience with that of Plan Ethiopia. The report of the national conference conducted in Albania is already produced.
- Plan Egypt is initiating a BR project.
- Plan Malawi is targeting the top policy and lawmakers to bring them on board. The support and goodwill will make it easier to implement their ambitious work Plan across the country. They have also targeted young people to disseminate information about BR.
- The Zambian Government has embarked on a countrywide campaign to achieve a 90% BR through radio programmes; posters, etc.; decentralization of BR system; and integrating BR in the provision of social services.
- Tanzania launched a camping immediately after the Regional Conference in Mombassa.
- Kenya has only reached 40% registration rate. They are going to take their technical people to South Africa and Botswana for experience sharing. Kenya has also offered to take the leadership in establishing a regional network of civil registrars.

In conclusion, he enumerated the follow-up actions proposed by the Regional Conference, which include:

- Support countries to learn from each other;
- Form a regional network of civil registrars;
- Undertake advocacy at all levels;
- Undertake studies related to BR; and
- Development the capacity of governments.

The facilitator thanked Mr. Kimaru for his presentation and call upon Mr. Joao Mendes from UNICEF-Guinea-Bissau to take the floor.

Asian and Africa Experience on Universal BR, Joao Mendes, Child Rights Officer UNICEF

Mr. Joao started by defining the scope of his presentation, which will focus on civil registry system, its implications on BR, lessons learned on BR from Asian countries and the specific experience of Guine-Bissau on BR.

He went on to summarize the need for a civil registration (CR) system as a mechanism to safeguard individual rights to social status and benefits. He said that CR includes the institutional, legal and technical settings needed to perform the CR functions. The goal of CR is to record all vital events occurring in the country and its citizens living aboard. Unlike a census, CR is a continuous and permanent process.

Live birth, death, marriage and divorce are the events that are given priority in CR. The CRC provides in its article 7 that the child shall be registered immediately at birth. Registration of birth has wide implications. Apart from being the first legal acknowledgment of a child's existence; BR is fundamental to the realization of a number of human rights. In the absence of BR, we cannot ensure that children enroll in school at the right age; enforce laws relating to minimum age for employment; protect children from early recruitment to the armed force and child trafficking; ensure that all children are immunized and receive appropriate health care; protect the child's right to a nationality; etc.

He then listed down the lessons learned from Asian countries. In East Timor, for instance, extensive sensitization of the community had been carried out prior to the implementation of BR system. Two Timorese community leaders were identified for this task. The campaign was successful because the community approach was used.

In other Asian countries, the following lessons were drawn:

- BR should make the delivery of other services, such as health services, educational, etc. an integral part of the system.
- The BR should be adequately implemented.
- There should be a strong network with schools, churches and traditional authorities in BR efforts. The modalities of work should be discussed before the implementation starts to define the roles of each stakeholder.

- Use existing structures where possible. Decentralizing the process is very important to enable the delegation of some responsibilities.
- Ensure links between BR and other child rights (BR should be considered as a strategy for the promotion of child rights)
- Create a BR logo so that wherever the logo is displayed, communities are reminder of the importance of BR.
- Mobile BR, which takes BR to the people, is critical to make BR accessible for all. Volunteers could be used in this respect.
- Advocacy through radio talk shows, posters and other communications materials is critical. The presence of the President at this Conference could be used as a tool for advocacy.
- Involvement of the private sector on issues such as the development and maintenance of be a database is important.
- Traditional birth attendants and baptism can be used as a source of information.
- Designating a month/week/day for BR in order to raise awareness and undertake intensive registration.
- Improving storage and retrieval of CR documents, particularly through computerization of the local CR system is important. Computerization process might be faced with a lot of obstacles as people might think that is taking away their employment opportunity.

With regard to the specific experience of Guinea-Bissau, Mr. Joao noted that previously more than half of children between 0-5 years were not registered. The main reasons for non-registration were the fee to register a child; the distance/accessibility of the services; the fact that the community did not know about CR; and the penalty that people had to pay for late registration.

Taking these obstacles into consideration, UNICEF and the Government of Guinea-Bissau designed a family civil registration project that is free of charge for children between 0-10 years.

He noted that the strategies used in this project were:

- Provision of the services to all children free of charge;
- Supply of basic equipments and materials to run the centers of registry;
- Training of all registry staff;
- Organization and management of mobile team;

- Collaborations among different partners;
- Advocacy and mass media campaigns using local languages and community radios and leaders;
- Revision of the code of Civil Registry according to article 7 of the CRC.

Mr. Joao added that by making the services free of charge, the Government lost a great amount of revenue. It was thus not easy to convince the Government to agree to that as it meant a loss of around \$500,000 per year.

In terms of monitoring and evolution, special forms for daily monitoring and monthly consolidation were designed. Even for the mobile team, a form is developed to monitor the results.

During 2005, the total registered children were 83,503. A number of vulnerable children, such as orphans, working/street children and refugee children were also targeted and registered.

He noted that since 2001, 400,000 children were registered in total. Due to the advocacy work undertaken by UNICEF and Plan, free BR service was made accessible for children between 0-3 years. Computerization of the system is in process. Decentralization has started. BR service is also re-established in maternity centers. The door-to-door approach used by the mobile team raised the awareness of the community but also made BR accessible to people living in remote areas.

In terms of constraints, Mr. Joao identified certain cultural practices that affect the implementation of BR. Computerization process further instills fear of unemployment or loss of employment amongst registry officials.

He ended his presentation by summarizing the future plans of the project, as follows:

- Advocacy and fund raising activities should be strengthened;
- The computerization process should continue; and
- Awareness raising should continue.

The facilitator, Wzo Amarech, then opened the floor for questions and comments.

One participant asked about the strategies used where traditional practices do not allow the registration of birth immediately at birth. Another asked if criminal penalties are set to make

BR compulsory other than civil liability. Yet another asked why the BR campaign in Guinea-Bissau only focus on a certain age range.

Mr. Joao replied that various traditional practices exist in most African countries. Only sensitization and advocacy will help to eliminate them as these practices have survived the passage of time. People should be allowed to understand the significance of BR. Any campaign should identify a key point of entry. He then admitted that he does not remember of any criminal liability where someone fails to register a child. However, he noted that before a penalty is imposed, the Government should make BR accessible throughout the country.

He informed the Conference that the age limit was imposed by the BR project in Guinea-Bissau because the project could not cover all children. The free service was made accessible to children between 0-3 years, from a free service to children between 0-3 months. This success was achieved due to the advocacy.

Ato Genene Bizuneh from the CSA provides from immediate registration, there is a practice to look for alternatives, as that is usually unrealistic in most Africa countries. However these alternatives do not takes us to our goal. He asked Mr. Joao his opinion in this regard. Mr. Joao's reply was that the Un recommendations should be adapted to the current circumstances of each country.

As the discussion of the first day was coming to an end, the facilitator, Dr. Bulti Gutema reminded the participants to remember to wear their badge the next day to avoid any security problems. He also noted that the first day revolved around the concepts and principles of BR, while the second day will focus on the practices experience in Ethiopia, based on the model programme implemented in three regions. He then thanked the participants and encouraged them to be on time the next day.

Tuesday, 14 March 2006

After welcoming the participants to the second day of the Conference, the facilitator, H.E Ato Demoz Mame from the Ethiopian Human Rights Commissions invited Ass. Prof. Tilahun Tesohmeto give his presentation.

[Synopsis on the Ethiopia Law of Civil Registration, Assistant Professor Tilahun](#)

Ass. Prof. Tilahun started by dividing his presentation into three main issues, which are the salient features of the law of civil status registration; major areas considered by the UN organic law on civil registration (CR); and the Ethiopian scenario.

Issue No. 1: The salient features of the law of civil status registration.

Under this section, Ass, Prof, Tilahun noted that the purpose of the law, the policy goal behind it, etc., will be discussed. He reinforced that the terms should be defined to avoid ambiguity.

He further reaffirmed that a human person is subject to rights from the date of his birth up to his death. The interdependence and inherent nature of rights is only recognised recently. In the past, only the rights of some people were fully recognized. Others had only few of their rights recognized and some did not have their rights recognized at all. For instance women and children only had some of their rights recognized, while slaves were rather objects of rights. Prisoners of war were the other group of persons whose rights were not recognized together with people who are sentenced to death. Registration of civil status has thus started to record the vital events of persons to enable them to have their rights fully recognized.

Birth, marriage, death, adoption, legitimization, acknowledgment, divorce, separation, naturalization, absence and change of names are vital events that result in different legal effects and consequences not only on the individuals involved but also on the community at large.

Civil registration legislation should thus decide which of these vital events should be registered, how and the value accorded to the certificates. It should further include the following elements:

- Provisions that define the objectives of the CR systems;
- Rules for compulsory registration of vital events defined by the law;
- Free service for few registration;
- Sanctioning non-compliance with the law;

- Provisions that specify the powers and responsibilities of the public organ in charge of implementing the law.

Civil registration is primarily important for the safeguard of individual rights. Registration of vital events is further critical for the planning and provision of social services in a country. The information gathered through CR is important for research and documentation, provision of social security identity. Voters' registration and administration of juvenile justice are also based on the absence of BR, age is determined by the use of medical examination, which does not determine the exact age but rather define the range.

Many of the international instruments that Ethiopia has ratified provided for the registration of vital events, such as the CRC, the International Convention on Civil and Political Rights, and the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women.

Issue No. 2: Major areas considered by the UN Organic Law on CRC (draft)

Ass. Prof. Tilahun noted that most of the issues raised under this section are taken from the 1998 Handbook on Civil Registration and Vital Statistics systems produced by the UN. The draft law provides for the registration of birth, marriage, divorce and death. It further states that the other events can be recorded as additional information.

He went on enumerating the content of the Draft Organic Law on CR that requires the registration to be compulsory and free of charge as an incentive. It also recommends for a single and uniform system for both unitary and federal political system. It further deals with the CR infrastructure, the responsibilities of a registrar and amendment of registration of records, etc.

The main difference between the Ethiopian law and this draft organic law is in the administration of CR system.

Issue No. 3: The Ethiopian Scenario

Ass. Prof. Tilahun started this section by reaffirming that the Civil Code of 1960 reinforces the significance of CR. Eighty percent of the provisions can be applied to the current situation though the administration of the CR system should be revised to take the current circumstances into account. If further tries deal with situations like the birth of a person on a

ship, the death of a person outside the country, etc. Amendment of records, issuance of certificates, false registration, etc. is dealt with. Unfortunately, the Civil Code also includes a transitory provision that provides for an order to be published for these provisions to become operational. This order has never been published. This laid to the beginning of a practice of issuance of certificate by different institutions to fill in the gap.

This also laid to numerous court cases, as the certificates issued by the different institutions are prone to errors and abuse. This is mainly due to lack of mechanism to prove the extent to which the documents are genuine.

During the Derg regime, two proclamations were enacted. These laws state that the powers and responsibilities of urban dwellers associations, the kebeles, shall among other things keep registers of vital events. However the directives were never issued to make these proclamations operational.

He ended his presentation by restating that the Revised Family Law provides that the Government shall issue a law on CR within six months from the coming into force of this law. Again such law has not come out.

The facilitator, H.E. Ato Demoz thanked Ass. Prof. Tilahun and called upon Ato Genene to make his presentation.

[Concepts, principles and Instrumental for the Establishment of Vital Registration and Statistics systems in Ethiopia in Ethiopia, Ato Genene Bizuneh.](#)

Ato Genene started his presentation by reaffirming the necessity of defending the concepts and principles of CR; collecting and maintaining standard/uniform information; and collecting complete information of vital events for a comprehensive and effective CR system. Defining the terms will further ensure the collection of standardized data throughout the country.

He reinforced that the registration of vital events should be continuous, permanent compulsory and universal. Awareness raising campaign on CR should give the appropriate focus on the continuous and universal nature of CR. The compulsory nature of CR should take into consideration the accessibility of the of the system.

He added that the vital registration system and vital statistics system should go together for a comprehensive CR system. In the 50s, there was a great need for statistics in Africa. There were thus efforts to strengthen the statistics system. This resulted in a number of problems, as the two systems were not coordinated.

An effective CR system has legal, statistic and collaborative functions. Ato Genene stated that the information gathered through this system would be used at the individual, familiar, local administration, national and international levels. The information will further be used to draw regular reports on a monthly, quarterly, bi-annual and annual basis.

He continued that the number of actions are expected from the Government, including establishing the necessary institutional framework that is accessible to the community and educating the public. Individuals and the community should also be involved to make this venture possible. Here, he noted that there are two method of registration: active and passive. The model programme combined both methods. When the CR system is too active, it discourages people from taking the initiative to come and register vital events.

During the implementation of the model programme, Ato Genene added, the community understood the signification of registering birth and marriage. But it took a while to explain the significance of registering death as that goes against their culture. This shows us, he stressed, that it is critical that registration of vital events be linked to benefits, such as immunization and health services.

He also noted that CR system should take into account the administration system of the country. There are two ways of administrating CR: centralized and decentralized system. The experience of many countries is documented to learn from their lessons.

With regards to the records of vital events, the original records are kept at the respective local administration. The copies will be kept at different levels (woreda, region and central registry). The compiled and analyzed information will also be kept at different levels (woreda, region and national levels). Dissemination of the information gathered through CR ranges from the individual to the international level.

He started that with the support of UNICEF, the model programme enabled the CSA to assess different levels of registration. There was a need for records, certificates, IEC materials,

monitoring and evaluation forms, registration forms, various training manuals and policy documents. The model programme also proved that computerization of the system is highly essential. Networking the system is another process, which facilitates the work of CR system. The model programme designed a computer and IT system for CR system with the funds from UNICEF. A local company designed the system making the maintenance and upgrading of the system easier and cheaper. The system can produce report for individual, legal and administration purpose.

Ato Genene then demonstrated how the computer program is used to record information, maintain data and produce reports.

The facilitator, Ato Demoz Mame, thanked the presenter and broke the session for coffee/tea for twenty minutes.

Second Session

The session resumed at 11:15 with a poem by the children's representatives entitled "Register the child". The facilitator then opened the floor for discussion.

One participant first thanked Ass. Prof. Tilahun for his presentation and then noted that due to the poverty rate in the country, many children are left on the streets by their parents. Who and how will these children be registered and named?

Samuel, one of the children's representatives, agreed that parents play a major role in registering a child. He then asked who would be responsible to register street children and orphans.

Another participant wanted to know what an annulment of marriage means. He then referred to one of the presentations made during the first day, which mentioned that a BR campaign in a certain country limited registration to children between 0-10 years. He wanted to know the reason behind this limitation. He then expressed his concern that discrepancies might arise between the CR systems in different as regional states have the mandate to enact their respective family law.

One participant referred to the provision in the Civil Code that defines a person as someone who is born and lived for 48 hours and asked its impact on statistics. Another participant said that vital events are dynamic in nature.

For instance a person, who is married today, may be divorced tomorrow and dead after a month. He wanted to know how these events are linked together. Yet another participant asked whether CR requires huge resources for implantation.

Ass. Prof. Tilahun replied as follows:

- The Civil Code provides for the registration of orphans and children left behind by their parents. The date of birth will be determined using the judgment of the registrar if the civil status and they should be given common names of the region where they are found.
- Annulment of marriage occurs when the requirements of the law is not met, such as age, relationship between the spouses, etc. This has an impact on the property, children born within the marriage, relationship created between the two families, etc.
- Due to the federal system of the country, regional states may enact their family law taking into consideration their respective cultural practices. However, there are fundamental rights that should be respected in all circumstances.
- The law of persons defines a person as someone who is born and has for at least 48 hours. However that might not be practical for statistical purpose.
- The implementation of CR has financial implication, as it is a venture that is costly. Different alternatives might be considered to reduce the financial implication. Some of these might be the use of already existing administration infrastructure, to start in a piece meal manner, etc.

Ato Genene further added that:

- The limit of age range is considered as an alternative in a country where there is no BR system. The ideal situation is nevertheless to register a child immediately at birth.
- There might be three methods to enact the CR legislation. One alternative is to enact the legislation at the federal level, the other is to prepare a standard legislation, which will be adopted by regional states and the third is to leave the enactment of legislation entirely to regional states.

- A child might even be considered as born before his actual birth. Through this might serve a purpose legally, statistically it does not. For the latter purpose, it is mainly the fact that the child is born alive or not that is required to register the birth as live birth or fetal death.
- The law recognizes three types of marriages but only one type of divorce. The registration of these events will be based on their legality and each registration will be linked to relevant records.
- Previously CR system implied a huge resource. However most of these costs are reduced with the computerization process. In addition we have to consider the costs implication due to lack of a CR system. The use of an already existing infrastructure and staff will further reduce the cost enormously.

The facilitator then apologized for not allowing other participants to ask questions due to lack of time and proceeded to the group work.

Before breaking into group discussion, Ato Genene reminded that the model vital registration programme was started with the funds from UNICEF. The objectives of the programme were to evaluate the technical instruments designed, assess the perceptions of different stakeholders, prepare for a nationwide CR system, pilot a computerized system, etc. He requested each group to discuss the progress, challenges and prospects of the model programme in one of the regional states. He informed the participants that guidelines are prepared for each group to guide the discussion. He further noted that a presentation will be made by the implementing office in each group to summarize the respective region to model programme in the respective region to initiate discussion. The group discussion ran until coffee/tea break in the afternoon.

Afternoon Session

[Reports from group discussion on the Progress, Challenges and prospects of Model Vital Registration Programme in Three Regional States of SNNP, Amhara and Tigray.](#)

Ato Genene called the reporters of each group to the podium.

Group discussing the model programme in SNNP Region.

1. How did the absence of CR legislation and system impact the implementation of the programme?

The rapporteur noted that the group gave major focus on the absence of CR registration. The main concern in this regard was the sustainability of the model programme in the absence of adequate legal framework. There is a draft regional directive of CR that was challenged by the fact that there is no federal legislation. This was further argued that CR is mentioned in the National Population policy. The draft is finalized and about to be tabled to the Regional Parliament. The group agreed that registration should be compulsory and a penalty for non-registration should be set. The sustainability of the model programme is questionable if a piece of legislation does not back the system.

2. What were the roles of legal, population, health and social service sector institutions in the implementation of the programme? What were the challenges and lesson learned? The rapporteur informed the plenary that a steering committee was formed in the Amhara Region that comprised different sectoral bodies, such as health, education, population, justice, regional administration, women's affairs, regions intuitions, etc. A technical committee was further formed to discuss technical issues. Religious institutions were included because they can reach the community more easily and because they register baptism and issue certificate. Because members more of the steering committee are high officials, attendance of most of the meetings is low.
3. What is the perception of the community, institutions and administration bodies on the registration of birth, death marriage and divorce? The rapporteur stated that kebele, woreda and regional officials were briefed at the beginning of the model programme and they were encouraged to further transmit the message. Then woreda administration officials were given training. Guidelines were also developed to register vital events. Sub-kebele administration officials (10 from each sub-kebele administration) were then trained to serve as informer on the occurrence of vital events.
4. What are the problems faced in the technical preparation and implementation? What are the solutions proposed to solve the problems? The main challenge was to start a programme as a model. People understood this as a research and not the real thing. They did not thus see the need to register vital events with the model programme. There were also beliefs that

there were other motives behind the system, they thought it was done for rationing food or provision of aid. Parents did not know their exact ages. Parents and witnesses were not able to come together to register the vital events.

Other problems include gap in the awareness level, low payment for registers, unpaid travel to remote areas, etc. Some also requested for marriage certificate for three different marriages. Others want to register marriages that do not fulfill the requirement of the law. At times, we consider these as customary marriages and register them as such.

The reporter stressed that awareness of BR as instrumental for other benefits and social services should be created and informers should be engaged to notify the occurrence of vital events. He also mentioned the practice of using the information gathered through the model programme to plan and implement immunization campaign as a great opportunity. The commitment of officials is also another opportunity.

The group identified the absence of a national plan of action and a federal legislation on CR as a threat to the model programme.

Group discussing the model programme in Amhara Region

1. How did the absence of CR legislation and system impact the implantation of the programme? The rapporteur said that he will not repeat the issues already raised by the previous rapporteur. He added that most of the discussion in this group also revolved around the sustainability of the programme. At the beginning, the rapporteur stated, that there was a fear that the programme will not succeed in the rural area. The reality is however the reverse. At the urban level, the different institutions issuing certificates created obstacles to the implementation of the programme because issuing certificates brings these institutions revenue. Information gathering also proved difficult, as some hospitals were not willing to share information on the occurrence of death for instance. There was also difficulty in gathering complete information on vital events.
2. What were the roles of legal, population, health and social service sector institutions in the implementation of the programme? What were the challenges and lesson learned? There was a steering committee established under the Justice System Reform Programme that has the mandate to register property and land. The programme was initially discussed

with this committee. The programme faced similar challenges as in the SNNPR. The registration was done at the kebele level and informers were used to notify the occurrence of vital events.

3. What is the perception of the community, institutions and administrative bodies on the registration of birth, death, marriages and divorce? The rapporteur went on noting that the community preferred to use the existing system than the model programme, because they thought that the certificates from the existing systems are more legal. Awareness raising activities were undertaken at religious and other gathering. The model programme was opposed in the urban areas as it resulted in a loss of income to institutions that use to issue certificates.

4. What are the problems faced in the technical preparation and implementation? What are the solutions proposed to solve the problems? The implementation of the programme in this region started after the one in SNNPR, it was thus possible to learn from their lessons. There was therefore no problem faced.

Group discussing the model programme in Tigray Region

1. How did the absence of CR legislation and system impact the implantation of the programme started in 2005 in Tigray. It started as a result of a misunderstanding that arose due to a problem in determining the age for school in Tigray. It started as a problem in one school in Tigray. The dispute was taken to a social court. This then laid to a discussion of the regional state with UNICEF to establishment a CR system. Previously, the rapporteur further noted that there were some efforts at registering vital events and there was a great need to coordinate these efforts.
2. What were the roles of legal, population, health and social service sector institutions in the implantation of the programme? What were the challenges and lesson learned? The Regional Bureau of Labor and Social Affairs (BoLSA) did an intensive awareness raising campaign. The roles of each institution were discussed and defined. A steering committee headed by BoLSA was then established. The main focus was on awareness creation. Training of trainers was also given. Enumerations were trained. Items, such as computers, file cabinets were purchased.

The main challenges were lack of coordination; information gap because research was not initially undertaken; lack of planning because the programme was not discussed at different levels, and evolutions and monitoring. The decentralization system; the health extension programme, and the requirement of data to monitor the progress towards the MDGs are the main opportunities identified by the group.

There is a need for a federal legislation, resources should be allocated, and the model programme should continue. The programme should not merely depend on funds from UNICEF.

At the beginning of the programme, the rapporteur remembered that there was a problem deciding who should provide the certificate. Previously it was the public prosecutor office that signed the certificate. The people also raised their concern of the legality and value of the new certificate.

Different institutions implement the programme. The mandate or responsibility did not then fall on one institution. The legislation would have to fill in this gap.

3. What is the perception of the community, institutions and administrative bodies on the registration of birth, death, marriage and divorce? The rapporteur noted that there is encouraging development at rural levels. Awareness is increasing, though the overall level of awareness is still low.
4. What are the problems faced in the technical preparation and implementation? What are the solutions proposed to solve the problems? The rapporteur recalled that the size of the files was too big and the forms had to be revised to make them user friendly. Since the enumerators are working on voluntary basis, the forms should be as easy and short as possible. There is also a problem of transportation, especially to reach the most remote areas.

Registration of death has become very difficult as it is considered culturally wrong. Registration of land and property is considered as a set back.

This group further reinforced that there is a need for a federal registration on CR, an information campaign strategy and awareness creation activities, and UNICEF's support to expand this into a nationwide CR system.

At the end of the group reports, Ato Genene added that the overall model programme is difficult to pilot as it is a complex system that requires the coordination of many institutions. Registration of birth weight should be done together with registration of birth. However that posed problems is areas where they do not have scales. In the SNNPR, the main problem was the lack of federal registration. There was a great commitment in the population Bureau that enable the successful implantation of the programme. In the Amhara region, there was also commitment but there was a lack of personnel. In Tigray, the initiative taken by the regional state should be given credit.

He ended his statement saying that the model programme in these regions has drawn enough lessons. If we want to continue with this model programme the next step will be to expand this to other regions but also to move on to the establishment of a nationwide CR system.

The facilitator, thanked the rapporteurs and opened the floor for comments or questions to enrich the discussion of each group.

Samuel, one of the children's representatives, asked why BR is not implanted as a right by the model programme. He also wanted to know why children did not participate in the implementation of the model programme. He further questioned whether the use of volunteers would not have a negative impact.

Another participant asked whether there is a discrepancy between the certificate issued by the model programme and the one issued by the municipality. Would a proper coordinator solve the competition between the model programme and municipality?

Ato Mulat from plan recognized the current efforts by way of the model programme. He, however, wanted to know whether we can say for sure that we are in a situation to implement a nationwide CR system in Ethiopia. Can we for sure know that the Government will act on this initiative in the near future?

Ato Genene said that the main objective of this Conference is to put this issue on the table for discussion. However, the presence of the President at the opening showed the Government's commitment to this issue.

The rapporteur from the group working on the model programme in the SNNPR replied that there was no conflict between the model programme and the municipality in his region. The municipality is actually a member of the steering committee. People are recently choosing the certificate issued by the model programme to the one issued by the municipality. He added that the model programme had planned an event that involved children. However, due to lack of time and current political situation, that was not undertaken. Advocacy activities are also planned with schools. He continued that the workload on registers is not much as registration of vital events does not occur often. The kebele should be involved in the registration, as this will be part of their daily activities in the long run. Paying the kebele officials to undertake this activity will thus not be sustainable.

The rapporteur on the model programme in the Tigray Region admired the children's representatives who pointed out the issue of child participation. In Tigray, the programme included child rights clubs in school to sensitise the public.

H.E. Ato Demoz Mame noted that the concern follow-up actions in this area is understandable. Many issues have been raised during the two-day Conference. The question of political will and commitment is also raised. The presence of the President and high officials at the opening of the Conference proves the commitment of the Government to the establishment of CR. There is a draft legislation tabled to the Parliament. The adoption of the legislation should take many issues into consideration. This Conference should not be the last. Other forums should be created to bring together religious leaders and other stakeholders. Meetings of experts should also be held to discuss the legislation in depth. He reaffirmed the commitment of the Human Rights Commission of work on this issue together with the task force established after the Regional Conference in Mombassa.

Ato Genene thanked UNICEF for funding the model programme. UNICEF has shown its commitment to further expand the model programme in other regions. UNFPA is also committed to fund vital statistics projects for the next five years. Plan Ethiopia, ACPF have also shown their commitment and interest to work on this issue.

The way forward: Scaling-up Vital Registration in Ethiopia

Dr. Bulti noted that most of the questions and concerns revolved around the sustainability of the model programme. The Conference has come out with a resolution that proposes follow-up actions to this National Conference. Wzo Amarech Ashenafi read the Resolutions to the plenary.

NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON REGISTRATION OF VITAL EVENTS WITH PARTICULAR FOCUS ON BIRTH REGISTRATION IN ETHIOPIA

13 – 14 March 2006, ECA – Africa Hall, Addis Ababa

Resolution

Despite the fact that a number of initiatives have been undertaken towards a registration system of birth, death, marriage and divorce in Ethiopia, the establishment of a system that fulfils international standards or the establishment of the required institutional framework has not been effective.

Recognizing the significance and importance of vital registration, the Justice System Reform Programme and the Revised Family Law provide for its establishment without any further delay. In addition, the fact that the House of Peoples' Representatives is considering the draft legislation of vital registration for adoption is another indication that the issue is give due attention and priority by the Government of Ethiopia.

We, the participants of the Conference,

- Recognizing that information gathered from the registration of birth, death, marriage and divorce is instrumental to the respect and protection of fundamental human rights and implementation of international human rights instruments ratified by Ethiopia;
- Taking into consideration that accurate information collected through registration of vital events determines in a sustainable manner the legal status and identity of individuals and assists in the administration of several social services in a modern and accountable manner;
- Believing that the only way of getting basic population data, including statistical data on birth and death in a sustainable and accurate way is through a system of registration of vital events that reaches the lowest administration level;

- Recognizing that registration of vital events provides the necessary social and economic data necessary to monitor and evaluate the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals;

Have therefore proposed the following recommendations to establish an effective registration of vital events in general, of birth in particular:

- 1) Birth registration is a right that is recognized by international instruments ratified by Ethiopia and national laws. The instrumental framework that would enable the realization of this right to all citizens should be established. All relevant stakeholders should take the appropriate measure in this respect.
- 2) The model vital registration programme being implanted in three regional states to assess the administrative and technical instruments needed for the realization of a nationwide vital registration in the country should be expanded to other regional states. The model programme should then be evaluated and its achievement be used to initiate a nationwide vital registration system in Ethiopia.
- 3) Birth registration is not given due attention because the awareness of birth registration as a fundamental right is low at the regional and national level. Therefore, efforts to sensitize relevant stakeholders, the community, especially the family should be strengthened.
- 4) Registration of vital events system can only be effective if it involves the participation of all citizens. The media plays a major role in this regard. Mass media should thus give high priority to the right of birth registration in their programs.
- 5) Considering the fact that registration of vital events will be implemented in different cultural settings, further studies need to be undertaken to study and analyze cultural factors related to vital registration.
- 6) Technical assistance from international organization and civil society is highly required because vital registration requires various skills and training, in addition to support of modern technology. All relevant stakeholders should thus coordinate their resources and technical capacity for the realization of vital registration in the country.
- 7) Finally, until the civil registration that grants the mandate to a specific body is enacted, it is recommended that the Ethiopian Human Rights Commission establish a national task force composed of major stakeholders that will be responsible for the coordination of the various initiatives that are already underway.

Dr Bulti then opened the floor for comments and questions on the Resolution. Ato Demoz noted that the Resolution should be considered as a set of recommendations. One participant noted that children should be considered as stakeholders. Active registration should also be

considered, especially for children with disability when a nationwide registration of vital events is put in place. Finally, the conference participants have agreed and endorsed the proposed resolution.

Dr Bultui then called upon H.E. W/ro Yesgiharege to close the Conference.



H.E Wzo Yeshiharege Damte, Commissioner for Children's and Women's Rights. The Ethiopia Human Rights Commission

“ This Conference has achieved its objectives, which was to feed into the various efforts towards the establishment of an effective CR system in the country and to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders. The conference has shown the significance of BR and has stressed on the fact that is a fundamental right recognized by international and regional instruments.” BR that is universal, compulsory, permanent and continuous.”

Closing

She started by thanking the facilitator and announced that this Conference has achieved its objectives, which was to feed into the various efforts towards the establishment of an effective CR system in the country and to strengthen the capacity of stakeholders. The Conference has shown the significance of BR and CR and has stressed on the fact that BR is a fundamental right recognized by international and regional instruments. This is a major contribution to the discussion for the adoption of registration legislation. She then assured the participants of the Conference of the political commitment but the concern is whether the necessary groundwork has been done to ensure the implementation of a CR system. The cost effectiveness, sustainability of the draft should be reconsidered and revisited. She further stressed the need to assess different alternatives that take the current circumstances of the country.

She stressed that follow-up actions should be taken by the relevant stakeholders, including civil society and regional states. She reiterated the opportunities identified during the Conference and the efforts already underway that would create an encouraging environment for further Commission. She also mentioned the establishment of Human Rights Commission that has a children's and women's rights section as another opportunity. She further recommended the

need to organize an awareness forum for the legal committee of the Parliament. An intensive sanitation work should be undertaken. This is a Conference that made a break through impact in the area of BR. She then closed the Conference by congratulating everyone for the great work.

**NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON REGISTRATION OF VITAL EVENTS WITH
PARTICULAR FOCUS ON BIRTH REGISTRATION IN ETHIOPIA**

13-14 March 2006, ECA - Africa Hall, Addis Ababa

Resolutions

Despite the fact that a number of initiatives have been undertaken towards a registration system of birth, death, marriage and divorce in Ethiopia, the establishment of a system that fulfils international standards or the establishment of the required institutional framework has not been effective.

Recognizing the significance and importance of vital registration, the Justice System Reform programme and the Revised Family Law provide its establishment without any further delay. In addition, the fact that the House of People's Representatives is considering the draft legislation of vital registration for adoption is another indication that the issue is given due attention and priority by the Government of Ethiopia.

We, the participants of the Conference,

- Recognizing that information gathered from the registration of birth, death, marriage and divorce is instrumental to the respect and protection of fundamental human rights and implementation of international human rights instruments ratified by Ethiopia.
- Taking into consideration that accurate information collected through registration of vital events determines in a sustainable manner the legal status and identify of individuals and assists in the administration of several social services in a modern and accountable manner;
- Believing that the only way of getting basic population data, including statistical data on birth and death in a suitable and accurate way is through a system of registration of vital events that reaches the lower administration level.
- Recognizing that registration of vital events provides the necessary social and economic data necessary to monitor and evaluate the progress towards the Millennium Development Goals;

have therefore proposed the following recommendations of establish an effective registration of vital events in general, of birth in particular;

1. Birth registration is a right that is recognized by international instruments ratified by Ethiopia and national laws. The instrumental framework that would enable the realization of this right to all citizens should be established. All relevant stakeholders should take the appropriate measure in this respect.
2. The model vital registration programme being implemented in three regional states to assess the administration and technical instruments needed for the realization of a nationwide vital registration in the country should be expanded to other regional states. The model programme should then be evaluated and its achievements be used to initiate a nationwide vital registration system in Ethiopia.
3. Birth registration is not given due attention because the awareness of birth registration as a fundamental right is low at the regional and national level. Therefore, efforts to sensitize relevant stakeholders, the community, especially the family should be strengthened
4. Registration of vital events system can only be effective if it involves the participation of all citizens. The media plays a major role in this regard. Mass media should thus give high priority to the right to birth registration in their programmes.
5. Considering the fact the registration of vital events will be implemented in different cultural settings, further studies need to be undertaken to study and analyze cultural factors related to vital registration.
6. Technical assistance from international organization and civil society is highly required because vital registration requires various skills and training, in addition to support of modern technology capacity for the realization of vital registration in the country.
7. Finally, until the civil registration legislation that grants the mandate to a specific body is enacted, it is recommended that the Ethiopia Human Rights commission establish a national task force composed of major stakeholders that will be responsible for the coordination of the various initiatives that are already underway.