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Your Excellencies,

**OPEN LETTER TO AFRICAN HEADS OF STATES FOR THE ADOPTION OF THE
PROTOCOL TO THE AFRICAN CHARTER ON HUMAN AND PEOPLES' RIGHTS ON
THE RIGHTS OF OLDER PERSONS**

As you meet for the twenty sixth ordinary session of the Assembly of the Union under the leadership of His Excellency Robert Mugabe, the President of Zimbabwe and current chairperson of African Union in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to discuss crucial issues for the development of the continent, we understand you will also be reviewing for adoption a new protocol that outlines your commitments to promote and protect the rights of older people in Africa.

The Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons (hereafter the Protocol) comes to you for adoption at the right time. In September 2015, we celebrated as we welcomed a new era in global development when leaders all over the world adopted 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development; a set of 17 global goals and 169 targets.

The success of the negotiations were made possible through the outstanding leadership of Ambassador Macharia Kamau of Kenya as the Co-chair and Ambassador Amina Mohamed from Nigeria who served as special advisers to the UN Secretary General on 2030 Agenda: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). We are very pleased that 2030 Agenda recognises 'people of all ages' and specially mentions Age and older persons in 15 out of the 17 goals, while older persons are specified in 3 targets.

Adoption of the Protocol is an opportunity for you, as Heads of State, to demonstrate your commitment to making Africa a continent where it is good to grow old, a continent where older people are treated with dignity and respect and as equal members of society.

The Protocol provides a guiding framework for realizing the rights of older women and men that are already guaranteed under the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights and the Protocol to the African Charter on the Rights of Women in Africa. However, implementing the provisions of the Protocol will not only directly benefit the lives of older Africans but also the lives of their families and communities, and thereby improve the well-being and cohesion of society as a whole. Societies where older people live free from fear and free from want are stronger, more peaceful and more stable societies for everyone.

The Protocol before you represents many years of discussion and deliberation, from its initial drafting through its progress through the organs of the African Union to this twenty sixth session of the Assembly of the Union. The Protocol builds on existing commitments made by African leaders to the rights of older people. It represents the latest step in the on-going commitment of African leaders to build a society for all ages. The Protocol realises the commitment made by African States in the 2002 African Union Policy Framework and Plan of Action on Ageing in Africa to elaborate and adopt a protocol on the rights of older people.

The timing at which you consider adoption of the Protocol is auspicious. You have recognized ageing and older people as central to the economic and social development of the continent in both the Sustainable Development Goals and Africa's Agenda 2063. Moreover, given the positive impact the Protocol will have on protecting the rights of older African women, adoption of the Protocol would also be a highly significant start to 2016 as the year of Human Rights in Africa with its special focus on women's rights.

Adopting the Protocol would be an act of commendable leadership and foresight on your part. It is a decision that will benefit the lives of millions of your citizens. It is a commitment that will empower older people to claim their rights and enable them to live dignified lives.

We therefore urge you to:

- Adopt the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Older Persons in Africa
- Continue to show leadership by ensuring that the Protocol is ratified and deposited with the African Union Commission
- Develop plans and strategies to domesticate and implement the Protocol at all levels.

We, the undersigned, commit to play our part in supporting your efforts and ensuring older people know and understand their rights as stipulated in the Protocol.

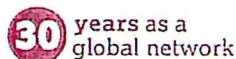
Let this be the best legacy you leave to current and future generations of this continent.

Yours sincerely



Toby Porter

**Chief Executive Officer (Co-signing on behalf of the organization named below)
HelpAge International**



The contribution older women and men make to society – as carers, advisors, mediators, mentors and breadwinners – is invaluable. But growing older is not without its problems. HelpAge International helps older people claim their rights, challenge discrimination and overcome poverty, so that they can lead dignified, secure, active and healthy lives. Our work in over 75 countries is strengthened through our global network of like-minded organisations – the only one of its kind in the world.

ENDORSED BY:

- Africa Disability Alliance
- Africa Women's Development and Communications Network
- African Population and Health Research Center
- Ageing with Smile, Gambia
- Caritas Gulu Archdiocese, Uganda
- CBM Kenya
- Centre for Citizens' Participation on the African Union
- Community Development Volunteers for Technical Assistance, Cameroon
- Current Evangelism Ministries Outreach, Sierra Leone
- Equality Now
- Elim Hlanganani Society for the Care of the Aged, South Africa
- Ethiopian Elders and Pensioners National Association, Ethiopia
- Fantsuam Foundation, Nigeria
- Global Coalition Against Poverty (GCAP) - Africa
- HelpAge Kenya
- HelpAge Ghana
- Lesotho Age Network
- Nsindagiza Organization, Rwanda
- Organization for Africa Youth
- Pan African Lawyers Union
- Reach One Touch One Ministries, Uganda
- Sabona Sonke Foundation, South Africa
- Senior Citizens Association of Zambia
- Solidarity for African Women's Rights Coalition
- South Africa Older Persons Forum
- State of the Union
- The National Zimbabwe Age Network
- The Malawi Network of Elderly Persons Organisations
- The Coalition of Caregivers and Advocates for the Elderly in Liberia
- The Center for Community Advancement and Family Empowerment, Liberia
- Uganda Reach the Aged Association
- VSO International
- VSO Jitolee
- United Methodist University, Liberia