To protect children’s rights in Africa, a continental study on Children without Parental Care (CWPC) has been launched at the 42nd ordinary session of the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACERWC) in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The study launched this Wednesday by the President of Ethiopia, Sahle-Work Zewde was to establish evidence on the nature and magnitude of CWPC on the continent so as to guide and formulate a continental normative and programmatic response.

President Zewde said the study was indeed a ground breaking document that clearly outlines among other things the nature and prevalence of children without parental care in Africa and the major drivers that cause children to live out of their parents care.

“There are many drivers unfortunately, you have seen abuses of children, poverty and conflicts are the main ones. Unfortunately we see it with our own eyes.” President Zewde noted.

President of Ethiopia, Sahle-Work Zewde addressing a session during the official launch of the study on children without parental care

“Given that children are among the most vulnerable members of our society, who are most of the time disproportionately affected by conflicts, its imperative that we consider the proposed recommendations and develop an action plan that will serve as a continent wide response ensuring the wellbeing of our children,” she emphasized.

Dr. Dereje Wordofa, President of SOS Children’s Villages International that collaborated with ACERWC and UNICEF to undertake the study said that, this provides a crucial evidence to comprehend the harsh realities these children face on a daily basis.

“The study findings shed light on the nature, prevalence, root causes, and drivers of this issue, offering valuable insights to critically evaluate existing normative frameworks and programatic responses,” Dr Wordofa said.

Conducted from 2020 to 2022 during the Covid-19 pandemic, the study found an estimated 35 million children in Africa are without parental care and are routinely

exposed to various forms of violence including sexual, forced labour, trafficking, unprecedented separation from parents and family or flee, natural man-made disasters, getting in contact with the law, substance and drug abuse, mental health issues, limited access to education, and healthcare.

Anne Musiwa, the Special Rapporteur on Children without Parental Care provided a list of recommendations to guide African countries through a unified understanding of what goes on in the lives these children.

She emphasized the need for legal frameworks and policies that could effectively address the complexities of this issue.

Discussions during the launch reverberated the end to institutionalized child care by working together to provide parental care environment.

Rwanda and Kenya were commended for the re-integration of children to family-based care or parental care. This is done by reintegrating children into families of origin after adequate preparation, use guidelines, adequate support and transition plan.

“We are all relying on you,” Linka Ndizeye, a child representative from Burundi requested the session of ACERWC to do more in protecting the rights of children without parental care.

Together with her colleague from Senegal, they pointed out some of the root causes that lead children into difficult situations requesting governments to adopt laws and appropriate budgets to support and address their issues.

The incoming Chairperson to the African Committee of Experts on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, Wilson Almeida Adão thanked all stakeholders for taking a step in trying to address the plight of the future generation.

He committed to work tirelessly to fight for the rights and never relinquish the dreams of children.

Recommendations provided in the study will guide member states to put in place mechanisms that ensure the rights and interests of children are observed.