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Statement Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, Related Intolerances And Inhumane Treatment Of Africans In China Over The Covid-19 Pandemic

(Banjul, 12 April 2020) During President Donald Trump’s briefings to the White House Press corps on 17 March 2020, he referred to the ongoing global Covid-19 pandemic as the “Chinese virus.” Shortly thereafter, there was an increase in acts and displays of Sinophobia, as well as prejudice, xenophobia, discrimination, violence and racism against people of East Asian and Southeast Asian descent in the US and other places around the world. Unfortunately, there was muted condemnation of this patently xenophobic and discriminatory statements by a leader of the so-called free world.

African Union Watch, a non-profit non-governmental organisation of African citizens, people of African descent and people of good will towards Africa, wishes to express its strong concern and condemnation against the rising incidents of xenophobia, racism and racial discrimination, wherever they are perpetrated.

AU Watch is particularly concerned by the sad and despicable news coming from China on the xenophobic, discriminatory and inhumane treatment against Africans, over the new Coronavirus by Chinese Immigration officials who seized their passports, landlords who evicted them, and businesses particularly hotels, which mistreated and denied them accommodation. African people were forcibly quarantined, tested and isolated.

AU Watch condemns in the strongest terms possible all acts of xenophobia, racism and discrimination against Africans in China, and against any people elsewhere in the world at all times, but particularly at this time due to Covid-19.

We agree with the statement of the Director-General of the World Health Organization, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who said that "stigma, to be honest, is more dangerous than the virus itself."

The Chairperson of AU Watch, Honourable Bahame Tom Murkiya Nyanduga, responding to the news from China, states that: “Africa has a long history of welcoming openly Chinese people in our communities, and that racism, racial discrimination and xenophobia against Chinese nationals should be condemned in the strongest terms.” He further stated that: “the Covid-19 pandemic has claimed the lives of over a hundred thousand people world-wide, up to this moment in time, forced millions around the world into “social distancing”, and sheltering in homes. We salute the health workers and frontline service providers in all countries, some of whom have paid dearly with their lives, in countries such as Italy, Spain, France, UK, Iran, United States and all

African states, from Kenya to Senegal, and South Africa to Egypt. This is a time for international solidarity, not discrimination. AU Watch salutes the Chinese Government for the measures it took to stop the virus from spreading further than it had done.

AU Watch was dismayed, and shocked when it learnt that Beijing, which many Africans have lately come to regard as a friend of Africa brazenly engaged in open, unprovoked, malevolent and wanton discrimination, racism, racial profiling, mass incarceration, xenophobic acts targeting African people in China. African people are being thrown out of their residences and hotels, and left homeless, jobless, having become targets of suspicion, and subjected to forced evictions and arbitrary quarantines over the Covid-19, whose origin had nothing to do with them!

AU Watch and the vast majority of Africans and as citizen of the world, believe it is our collective responsibility, as members of the human race to confront it without stigmatisation and to ensure our spaces are inclusive and accessible to all.

AU Watch commends the African Ambassadors in China for their timely intervention with the Chinese authorities by offering diplomatic and consular protection to the African people, and to ensure that China immediately brings to an end the xenophobic, racist, discriminatory and inhumane treatment against Africans and people of African descent in China due to the Covid-19, and at any other time.

AU Watch wants the Chinese Government to know, that AU Watch condemns in the strongest of terms the forceful testing, maltreatment, the mass and indiscriminate incarceration of mainly African nationals in the name of quarantine in Guangdong Province, and in Sanheli, a neighbourhood in Yuexiu, that is known as “Little Africa” in particular. We are aware that, even though there only 16 confirmed cases of foreigners in Guangzhou’s Yuexiu District (at the date of this Statement) from African countries with COVID-19, what is more terrifying than the virus itself, for the black community there, is the rising tide of discrimination driven by both coronavirus-fuelled xenophobia and deep-rooted prejudice against black people in China. We are further alarmed by the rumoured planned testing of vaccines on Africans, as reported by many newspapers around the world. If those rumours are true, we denounce it in the strongest possible words.

AU Watch wishes to draw the attention of the Government of President Xi Jinping of the People’s Republic of China, to:

Government of the Peoples’ Republic of China

- Ensure that all xenophobic, racist, discriminatory measures taken by Chinese government authorities, landlords and businesses targeting African people are rescinded and brought to end. African people in China must be guaranteed all their basic and fundamental rights and freedoms, similar to any person legally resident in China.

The African Union and African Union Member States

- Welcomes the African Union's concerns about the growing xenophobia and racism against black Africans;
- Commends the African Ambassadors in China for their timely intervention to protect the rights of African people in China;
- Calls upon the Chairperson of the African Union and its Bureau, the Chairperson of the African Union Commission, to continue monitoring the situation, and to issue a strongly worded message to President Xi Jinping, if the Government of the People's Republic of China is unable to guarantee the rights and freedoms of African people in China.

African Citizens in China and Africa

- Calls upon all Africans in China to pay attention to social distancing measures, to put safety first, remain calm and report to police, universities and their respective embassies any acts of xenophobia, discrimination and inhumane treatment against them promptly;
- Requests all citizens of Africa, who rightly are infuriated with pictures and stories of racism against Africans in China, especially over the Covid-19 pandemic, to refrain from any acts of retaliation against Chinese nationals in their countries.

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