



## Statement

# Commemorating International Day of the Girl Child

11<sup>th</sup> October 2018

*"Girls are a special resource and vast investment, whose potential remains largely undermined and untapped. There is need to move away from gender equality rhetoric, and scale up actual action towards achieving equality at all levels as part of the global commitment towards realizing gender equality and equity.*

*SAfAIDS, through regional and local programmes in the SADC region, remains highly committed to safeguarding and promoting the rights of the girl child. We join the rest of the world in striving for gender equality on this day, 11<sup>th</sup> October and every other day throughout the year. We must be mindful that girls are an Investment for the progress of society as a whole. We cannot talk about development without addressing the inequality hindering our girls' progress and development. We need to address child marriages, teenage pregnancies, unsafe abortions and all forms of violence perpetrated against girls. We owe it to our girls and our future, to fully invest in the development of the girl child."* SAfAIDS Executive Director, Mrs Lois Chingandu

**Each year globally, since 2012, 11<sup>th</sup> October marks the International Day of the Girl Child; a day that is set aside to raise awareness and reflect on pressing gender inequalities girls continue to face across sectors. Globally, girls continue to be denied access to fundamental human rights and needs including education, health and adequate shelter, and are continuously exposed to violence and oppression. UN Women reports that approximately 12 million girls under 18 years will be married and 21 million girls between 15-19 years will become pregnant this year alone; robbing them of opportunities to complete education and meaningfully contribute to socio-economic and political development in their respective countries and regions.**

**The International Day of the Girl Child this year is being celebrated under the theme, 'With Her: A Skilled Girl Force.' However, at least one quarter of young people, most of them girls, are neither employed nor getting an education or training (UN Women 2018). Hence, the dream of a skilled girl force may remain far from reality for most girls, unless like-minded stakeholders collaborate, magnify and escalate their efforts towards achieving Sustainable Development Goal 5 on gender equality, among other development agendas and safeguard the future of all girls.**

**SAfAIDS joins the UN family and the rest of the world in commemorating the International Day of the Girl Child, and bringing challenges faced by girls to the core of global development commitments; highlighting the interlinkages between upholding rights of girls and investing in their future, and overall development across sectors globally. An educated and empowered generation of girls is central to achieving sustainable development, socio-economic growth and ending poverty.**

**SAfAIDS continues to build the capacity of girls through education and mentorship, increasing positive sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) outcomes and fostering a generation of empowered and skilled girls in the SADC region.**

**This year, we are affirming and pledging our commitment to improving the lives of girls in the SADC region on this Day and throughout the year. Through its regional and country programmes across southern Africa, SAfAIDS is focused on empowering girls, harnessing their potential and creating platforms for education and training, increased capacity in decision making for better SRH outcomes, and access to SRH services and enjoyment of their SRHR rights. As part of the SAfAIDS Regional Young People's Leadership Academy, SAfAIDS is pioneering a regional Graduate Trainee programme offering professional training and mentorship to girls across the SADC region, aimed at creating a cadre of skilled and well-rounded professional young women who will spearhead and contribute to socio-economic development in their respective countries.**

**As we commemorate the Day, let us also celebrate trailblazing girls globally, who are pioneering and leading development in key sectors including science, health, information technology, education and aviation, among others.**

***Join the 11<sup>th</sup> October Movement,  
Let us Commit, Invest and Magnify efforts to Protect Her, and  
Accelerate the Development of a Skilled, Confident and Productive Girl Force  
in the SADC region!***

**Knowledge for action: The power to make a difference!**