

Speech

by

Hon. Janet K. Museveni, M.P.

Uganda's First Lady

and Minister for Karamoja Affairs

at the

**2012 Regional Meeting of Southern and Eastern Africa
Parliamentary Alliance of Committees of Health
(SEAPACOH)**

at

Speke Resort Munyonyo, Kampala

August 29, 2012

- **Hon. Dr. Christine Ondo, Minister of Health of Uganda**
- **Hon. Blessing Chebundo, the Chairperson of SEAPACOH**
- **Hon. Members of Parliament from the Region**
- **Dr. Jotham Musinguzi, Regional Director, PPD Africa Region**
- **Ms. Janet Jackson, UNFPA Representative in Uganda**
- **Ladies and Gentlemen.**

I am very pleased to join you here in Munyonyo for the official opening of the 2012 Regional Meeting of Southern and Eastern Africa Parliamentary Alliance of Committees of Health.

I would like to start by welcoming all of you to Kampala, Uganda. My special welcome goes to those of you who are visiting Uganda for the first time. For those of you who have been to Uganda before, welcome again.

I am also very pleased to learn that for the last 2 days, Women Parliamentarians from Ghana, Malawi, Ethiopia and Uganda have been meeting here in Munyonyo, separately, strategizing and discussing how to improve women's health

and I am told that they are also part of this larger meeting. You too are most welcome to Uganda.

It is my great delight to officially open this Regional Meeting of Parliamentarians as you discuss the importance of reproductive health and how this affects the health and welfare of women and children in this region of Africa. I am particularly delighted that the focus of this conference is on the health of women. This topic resonates very well with Uganda's priorities. I am also mindful that other African countries in this region do prioritize the welfare and wellbeing of women and children. Investing in the improvement of women's health and the overall improvement of their welfare and quality of life is an important contribution to the development of the African people.

Maternal and child health in Africa remains a cause for concern. You have heard for yourselves from those who have spoken before me of the unfavourable situation and plight of Africa's women and children. As part of Government here in Uganda, I know we are doing everything we can, as a nation, to ensure that women do not die in pregnancy and childbirth,

so needlessly. I am equally aware that many African countries where you have come from are doing exactly the same for the sake of the welfare of women and children. Furthermore, I know we are all making some progress and we have come a long way in the last 2 decades or so.

This notwithstanding, our best efforts still meet a number of challenges as we address the health of women and children. The situation in Africa is further compounded by weak health systems, inadequate human resources for health, poor quality of health services, inadequate funding and general lack of medicines and supplies.

When women die in pregnancy and childbirth, it does not just end with loss of the mother. The orphans left behind experience untold suffering. Sometimes and indeed often, the women who do not die suffer permanent debilitating injuries like obstetric fistula, which is a very dehumanizing condition. I am referring to this particular condition because I know how it affects our women, especially the very young ones, most of them in their teenage years (15-19 years). I am also aware that globally, we lose not just women and children and their

lives, we also lose on productivity and the economic contribution they would have made to society. The importance of this regional meeting for Parliamentarians who sit on Committees of Health in our region therefore, cannot be overemphasized.

Ladies and gentlemen

With increasing research, information and knowledge, we have come to gain better insights regarding the causes and underlying conditions that continue to undermine the health status of our women and children, in spite of our best intentions and efforts.

The causes of death among our women and children are well known and are all largely preventable. Furthermore, low cost or relatively cheap, cost-effective technologies to prevent this tragedy also exist and are also well known. We therefore, have a responsibility to ensure that women do not continue to die from preventable conditions whose remedies are available to us.

Today as we gather here as a Parliamentary Alliance and Women Parliamentarians to share and learn about best practices, we also need to be aware that recently the UK Government under Prime Minister David Cameron together with Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation hosted a Summit on July 11th in London, where a selected group of world leaders from both developing and developed countries met to demonstrate their support for women's health, reproductive health and family planning.

Specifically, these world leaders agreed to re-dedicate their commitment by mobilizing more resources at country level, first and foremost, and also continue to work with donors and other partners to mobilize new and additional resources. It is important that as we develop these partnerships, leaders and policy makers like yourselves reflect on how to ensure sustainability of programmes at country level and the centrality of social economic transformation, if this has to happen sustainably. This point is a centre piece of my message to you today and it is also a challenge to you as leaders.

Before I conclude, I would like to once again welcome all of you to this beautiful resort on the shores of Lake Victoria. I want to personally thank you for finding time off your busy schedule to travel to Uganda.

It is my sincere hope that the organizers of this meeting have made adequate arrangements for you to have time off your business schedule, so that you can visit and see for yourselves what Uganda can offer outside the conference facilities.

It is now my pleasure to declare this year's Regional Meeting for this Parliamentary Alliance for Southern and Eastern Africa officially open and I wish you fruitful deliberations.

Thank you and God bless you all.