

SPEECH

BY

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AT

**THE OPENING OF THE REGIONAL MEETING OF PARLIAMENTARY
COMMITTEES OF HEALTH IN EASTERN AND SOUTHERN AFRICA**

SPEKE RESORT, MUNYONYO, KAMPALA

August 29, 2012

Our Guest of Honor, Hon. Janet K. Museveni, First Lady of Uganda and Minister of Karamoja Affairs.

Hon. Blessing Chebundo the Chair of SEAPACOH

Hon. Members of Parliament from SEAPACOH member countries

Dr. Jotham Musinguz, the Regional Director of PPD Africa Regional Office

Ms. Janet Jackson the UNFPA Representative, Uganda

Mr. James Kotzsch the Country Director of DSW, Uganda

Representatives of Development Partners

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen.

I am very delighted to be here with you today, to give some opening remarks as you start this important Regional Meeting of Southern and Eastern Africa Parliamentary Alliance of Committees of Health (SEAPACOH).

Let me take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this meeting for inviting me and congratulate them for organizing such an important gathering for members of Parliament from many African countries.

I have noted that the primarily purpose of the meeting is to promote information exchange, facilitate policy dialogue and identify key areas to reposition family planning and reproductive health in this region, a subject that is surely of high importance. It is of high importance, because, investing in reproductive health is excellent value for money and, family planning is a "best buy" in global health due to its low cost and far reaching benefits, including benefits to mother, child, community and the nations.

Ladies and Gentleman

Although women and girls today, especially in our continent, tend to enjoy better health, more RH rights, and longer lives than the previous generation did, far too many women do not enjoy these benefits.

In particular, many women do not enjoy full sexual and reproductive health and rights. These rights are recognized as fundamental human rights because women cannot fully participate in society unless they are able to control the number, spacing, and timing of their children. They cannot enjoy general health and well-being unless their sexual and reproductive health and rights are met. Since the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) organized by the United Nations in Cairo, Egypt in 1994, the overwhelming majority of the world's nations have committed to promoting and protecting these rights, but governments often shirk their responsibilities, and it is women who pay the price.

The ICPD also stressed the need for better access to sexual and reproductive health information, services and rights and how these play a pivotal role in expanding women's choices, opportunities and autonomy and enable them not to only plan their families and enjoy a healthy life, but to also participate more actively in both public and private life and contribute to greater social, economic and environmental progress for all.

According to Uganda's recent Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS 2011), Uganda has recorded some improvement on the health related MDGs. For example we have reduced the Infant Mortality Rate from 122 per 1000 in 1990

to 54 per 1000 in 2011. This is an improvement of 55 % over a period of the last 20 years. Even on the most difficult maternal Mortality Ratio, Uganda has witnessed a reduction from 523 per 100,000 live births in 1990 to 310 per 100,000 in 2011. This a decrease of 40 %.

Although we are proud of this performance related to decrease of child mortality, maternal mortality among other health related indicators as indicated in our last Demographic and Health Survey (DHS), we know that the journey remains long and hard for us to reach the targets of the internationally agreed on Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG5 target on the reduction of maternal mortality.

This is why we need to put more energy and work hand-in-hand in partnership with all parties to put the needed solutions in place to achieve this goal and to ensure that all women have equal access to quality and affordable health services.

In order to register positive impact on maternal health, we must continue to invest and prioritize on all the other key factors, including girl's education, access to skilled birth attendance, and overall determinants of social and economic transformation in living conditions of our people.

Ladies and Gentlemen

Last month, at the historic Family Planning Summit held in London, that aimed at focusing global attention on family planning in the context of global leadership from both developed and developing countries, Uganda was represented at the highest level by **H.E Yoweri Museveni, President of**

Republic of Uganda. With this support coming from the top, it is now for us policy makers, working with technical people to commit to making those commitments a top priority in order to allow every couple access quality health services including family planning and reproductive health.

We also count on the continued support of all our partners and we have very high hopes that this landmark initiative will help us mobilize the necessary resources and ensure affordable and quality health services to make a lasting difference in the lives of our people.

I am certain that many of the distinguished members of the audience from different countries have a lot of successes to share among yourselves and, I believe this conference provides you with an opportunity to share best practices and initiatives in the comfort of this beautiful hotel on the shores of Lake Victoria.

I believe that by working together, we can transform the lives of women, their families and communities, for a better present and future life.

Let's make sure we use the time dedicated to this meeting to really advance our collective cause and I wish you fruitful deliberations at this conference.

Thank you.