

SPEECH

BY

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AT THE OPENING OF THE

MEETING OF NETWORK OF AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES  
OF HEALTH (NEAPACOH)

ON

OCTOBER 28, 2021

Hon. Dr. Charles Ayume, Chairperson Parliamentary Committee of Health

Hon Dr Chris Baryomunsi, MP, Minister of ICT and National Guidance, Uganda

Hon Fako Moshoeshe, the Chairperson of NEAPACOH

Mr. Adnene Ben Haj Aissa, the Executive Director, PPD

Dr Eliya Zulu, Executive Director, AFIDEP

Representative of UNFPA, Uganda

Distinguished Hon. Members of Parliament

Representatives of Development Partners

Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure for me to speak to you at the opening of this hybrid meeting of the 2021 Network of African Parliamentary Committees of Health (NEAPACOH). First of all, let me take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this meeting for inviting me and congratulate them for organizing such an important meeting. I would like to take this opportunity to welcome and thank all of you from your respective countries of the African continent and beyond for finding time to attend this meeting either physically or virtually. I want to send special welcome to all of you who are attending NEAPACOH meeting for the first time.

I would like also to thank the Hon. Minister of ICT and National Guidance, Hon Dr Chris Baryomunsi, for finding time out of your busy schedule to be with us this morning. Your presence is a great honor to us and is indeed a testimony of your commitment to playing a role to ensuring that our people live healthier lives. I know you have this network at heart, and you've always given this forum your utmost consideration. Thank you.

In my previous roles as Regional Director of PPD ARO, I was directly involved in supervising the holding of NEAPACOH meetings which have been held annually, since 2008. I therefore know how involving it can be to organize this meeting. I want to thank the Secretariat of NEAPACOH together with other partners who have continuously and consistently provided support in one way or the other in the organization of NEAPACOH meetings. To the staff of PPD ARO, congratulations upon spearheading this event with such magnanimity.

Honorable members of parliament hold special positions in society, and it is as such that we believe that you can use your privileged positions to improve the quality of life of the people that you lead. We do have trust in you and we are convinced that you are the best audience we should run to if we need certain actions that anchor around your roles are to be taken to improve the health being of our communities. We believe that our views and concerns would be heard, understood and taken care of seriously if they come from you. That is why we are keenly devoted to working with parliamentarians to build your capacities and facilitate your decision making in putting in place conducive environment for implementation of international and regional agreements like the ICPD goals and the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. Therefore, having a meeting like this one that is targeting parliamentarians on identifying solutions and game changers for accelerated implementation of the ICPD PoA and achievement of the SDGs is not farfetched. Our countries have very good and clear policy frameworks but the problem on our continent remains a lack of political will and commitment to support the implementation of these otherwise good policies.

It is exactly one year since PPD ARO and partners organized the 2021 NEAPACOH meeting. The discussions and recommendations that evolved are still fresh in our memories. And at the 2019 NEAPACOH meeting, a **“Kampala Call to Action”** was developed and adopted, as well as country commitments, to deliver better RH/FP outcomes in our countries. Those of you who participated in the discussions and adoption of the **Call to Action** agree with me that it was an excellent document loaded with far reaching recommendations for improving health outcomes in the context of betterment of reproductive health and family planning indicators in our region. The Nairobi ICPD Summit of November 2019, which many of us attended, reignited the debate during which diverse views on human rights, population, sexual and reproductive health, gender equality and sustainable development were discussed and global consensus arrived at placing individual dignity and human rights at the very heart of development. Along with this global consensus, countries developed commitments aimed at ensuring zero preventable maternal deaths; zero unmet need for family planning information and services and zero Gender-based violence and harmful practices. It is therefore gratifying that this meeting is being held with the theme of **“Sustainable programmes for accelerating the achievement of ICPD goals and SDGs: The role of Parliamentarians.”** As parliamentarians, we need to discuss and define our niche to contributing to a debate and processes on what works to accelerate achievement of the commitments that our governments have made at different levels overtime.

On Uganda’s part, some modest improvements have been achieved in some of our health indicators although we can’t count ourselves as the best in the region. There has been a progressive reduction in most of the mortality indicators over the previous

fifteen years: Under-five mortality rate declined from 90 (2011) to 54 per 1,000 live births in 2016; Infant Mortality Rate (IMR) declined to 43 per 1,000 in 2016 from 54 per 1,000 live births in 2011; Maternal Mortality Ratio (MMR) declined from 438 per 100,000 live births in 2011 to 335 in 2016; and Life expectancy increased from 43 years in 1999 to 63 years by 2016. This situation is definitely not where we would want to be.

We are therefore eager to listen to, and learn from countries how you have progressed in implementation of the commitments. We are eager to know and learn what innovative practices you deployed that can potentially be replicated considering our country contexts. In a nutshell, we are eager to know how the commitments you made have been translated into concrete action to make ICPD and SDGs a reality. In saying all this, I am only emphasizing that in whatever commitments we make, whether at global or regional levels, we need to move from speech lines to creation of specific action lines to account for the pledges that we make.

That is why we at the National Population Council that is responsible for coordinating the implementation of the National Population Policy in Uganda feel much honored to be part of this meeting. On behalf of National Population Council for Uganda, I am therefore very pleased to associate myself with this meeting. We look forward to collaborating with PPD ARO and other partners to providing an endearing space for visibility and implementation of the recommendations of this meeting.

I thank you.