

**SPEECH**

**BY**

**HON. DR. CHRIS BARYOMUNSI**

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**AT THE OFFICIAL OPENING OF THE**

**VIRTUAL MEETING OF THE 2021 NETWORK OF AFRICAN PARLIAMENTARY  
COMMITTEES OF HEALTH (NEAPACOH)**

**ON**

**OCTOBER 28, 2021**

Hon. Dr. Charles Ayume, Chairperson Parliamentary Committee of Health, Uganda  
Hon. Fako Moshoeshoe, Member of Parliament Lesotho and Chairperson NEAPACOH  
The Director General, National Population Council  
The Executive Director, PPD, Mr. Adnene Ben Haj Aissa,  
The Executive Director, African Institute for Development Policy, Dr. Eliya Zulu,  
Distinguished Hon. Members of Parliament,  
Representatives of Development Partners,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great pleasure for me to be here this morning to speak to at the opening of this important regional meeting of Parliamentary Committees of Health in Africa (NEAPACOH). First of all, let me take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this meeting for inviting me and congratulate them for consistently organizing such an important meeting. I take this opportunity to welcome all our brothers and sisters who have logged in from different countries across Africa, to participate in this meeting.

It's unfortunate that for two times running, we have not been able to host you in Uganda for a NEAPACOH meeting that is physical as has been the case with all such meetings that Uganda has hosted from 2008 to 2019. The COVID 19 pandemic is still with us and it is our responsibility to make sure that we don't expose you to risks of contracting the pandemic. I do hope that with the fast paced prevention measures that are going on including massive vaccinations in our continent, we should be in position to again have a physical NEAPACOH meeting, come October 2022. I also want to thank the organizers for consistently ensuring

that this meeting takes place annually and around the same time. I have just been reminded that the 2020 NEAPACOH meeting was held on October 28, which is exactly one year ago.

I have always been part of NEAPACOH right from the time I was a backbencher in Parliament of Uganda and so the work of the network is so dear to me and close to my heart. I salute the Executive of NEAPACOH together with all other stakeholders – UNFPA, AFIDEP, NPC and others that have continuously provided support to ensure that this important meeting is hosted annually.

This is not just an ordinary meeting. Bringing together honorable members of parliament who hold special positions in society, means that the role that you play in ensuring the quality of health of the people we lead, is regarded very highly. As Members of Parliament, I believe that we should be at the fore front of not only legislating and approving policies, but also providing the necessary guidance and oversight for effective and efficient implementation of such policies. We also have powers within our hands and reach to ensure that resources are allocated for implementing quality health programmes that benefit the population. This is not to mention the innovations and technologies that are fast evolving which we can take advantage of to ensure accelerated delivery of quality health related services in our countries, region and continent amidst the COVID 19 pandemic that we are faced with.

The NEAPACOH meetings have always provided an excellent platform to share progress, lessons learned and challenges on implementation of the reproductive health and family planning related commitments that our countries make at different fora. They have also provided excellent forums for building the capacity of parliamentarians to contribute to improved accountability, leadership and

stewardship for the implementation of the health related programmes in order to meet the SDGs by 2030 in the region. As a professional with medical background, I am therefore very happy to be part of, and associate myself with NEAPAHO meetings, because the objectives for which they are held are very close to my heart.

As a member of the Parliament of Uganda, I therefore feel very much honored to interact with you yet again. I hope that we shall receive exciting reports, especially from those countries that attended the 2019 NEAPACOH meeting, on the progress that you have made to achieve the commitments that you made, and the good and innovative practices that you applied that can potentially be applied by some of our countries. I am saying this because in our region, we face similar challenges that constrain the delivery of better Reproductive health and family planning programmes and the solutions to these challenges are similar and can apply across our countries.

I know that for the past NEAPACOH meetings, Parliament of Uganda has been committing to do a number of things, including having a National Health Insurance Scheme passed into law. I am happy to report that the 11<sup>th</sup> Parliament of Uganda approved the National Health Insurance bill. What awaits now is for the President of Uganda to assent to the bill so that it becomes a law. With the support that the bill has in Parliament and wider society, I don't see the bill failing to be signed into a law. I am certain that in the next round of our reporting during the next NEAPACOH meeting, we shall be telling you that Uganda has a National Health Insurance Scheme that is operationalized by an Act of Parliament. I have just singled out one commitment that Parliament of Uganda has been working on,

my colleagues will later on share progress and challenges remaining with implementation of other commitments.

This year's meeting has that been organized with the theme **“Sustained Programs for the Achievement of ICPD goals and SDGs during and post COVID 19 era: Role of Parliamentarians”** is very timely and could not have been organized any later than now. It is only two years when most of us were in Nairobi at the ICPD Summit of November 2019 where our governments, represented at the highest level, made far reaching policy and programme commitments to improve reproductive health and family planning outcomes. What followed was a period of inaction, occasioned by the onset of the COVID 19 pandemic.

This meeting therefore provides us an opportunity to assess ourselves how we've facilitated the implementation of the commitments amidst the COVID 19 Pandemic. We need to note that even when we were hit by COVID 19, the SRH needs of our people did not end. How we ensure that our people still continue getting access to quality SRH services unconstrained is a question that am pausing to all of us and hoping to learn from the different parliamentarians participating in this meeting.

A number of our countries in the region have suffered the blunt of COVID 19 with poor maternal & child health conditions knocking on the doors if nothing is done. Teenage pregnancies have shot high with babies giving birth to fellow babies during the lockdown period. This will definitely have implications for socio economic development. This is going to have a very big impact on our development, especially at this point in time where we all want to tap into harnessing the demographic dividend, given that our countries are bottom heavy, with the young population constituting the biggest percentage of the total population.

I therefore look forward to having good discussions and deliberations that can yield into tangible and practical solutions to addressing the health challenges that we are facing. On behalf of the Government of Uganda, I am therefore very pleased to be part of this meeting which I have been honored to officiate at its opening. COVID 19 is still with us. Please take care and keep safe from COVID19. Please respect the safety guidelines and SOPs in your respective countries.

I declare this meeting officially opened and wish you fruitful deliberations.

For God and My Country. Thank you.