

SPEECH

BY

**HON. DR STEPHEN MALLINGA
MINISTER OF HEALTH, REPUBLIC OF UGANDA**

AT

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

SPEKE RESORT, MUNYONYO, KAMPALA

SEPTEMBER 21, 2009

The Regional Director, PPD Africa Regional Office, Dr Jotham Musinguzi
The Chairman, SEAPACOH, Dr Blessing Chebundo
The Deputy Executive Director, APHRC
The Representative of EQUINET
Distinguished Hon. Members of Parliament both from Uganda and outside Uganda
Representatives of Development Partners
Ladies and Gentlemen.

It is a great pleasure for me to be here for the opening of the regional meeting of Parliamentary Committees of Health in Eastern and Southern Africa.

First of all, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the organizers of this meeting for inviting me to this meeting. Indeed, I feel greatly honoured.

Secondly, I would like to take this opportunity to, on behalf of Uganda Government welcome you all to our country. I want to welcome our brothers and sisters who have come all the way from the different countries to attend this meeting. I also want to welcome delegates from collaborating organisations and development partners for putting aside your precious time in order to attend this meeting. Thank you once again – you are welcome.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are faced with a collective responsibility to do everything in our power and ability to save humanity by contributing to improved quality of life of our people. This can be by way of putting in place accountable human development agendas that relate, speak and act with and towards one another. This, in essence, is the discourse of integrated planning and sustainable development.

I hope the delegates gathered here will agree with me that our countries share similar reproductive health problems. The problems range from high incidences of Sexually Transmitted Infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, high maternal mortality rates, high infant mortality rates, low contraceptive use, unmet reproductive health needs among many others. The list of problems is long, and I am aware each country is searching for ways to solve them. However, the demands on our governments are many, and that is why we encourage meetings like this one to assist in finding solutions to some of the problems. A forum like this one provides an opportunity to review our current situation, discuss problems, exchange the rich experiences existing within our countries, and search for common solutions to our many problems.

I have been informed that this meeting is being held a year after a similar one was held in September 2008. I have also had an opportunity to read and understand the objectives of this meeting which are to exchange information and good practices on the implementation of the resolutions set and adopted at the September 2008 meeting. This meeting will also receive updates on the situation in our countries in relation to implementation of regional sexual reproductive health and rights frameworks including: Maputo Plan of Action; ICPD Programme of Action, the Abuja Declaration and the Ouagadougou Declaration; among others. I also note with gratification that this meeting will discuss priority areas of action by parliamentarians as you carry out your representation, legislation, budget appropriation and oversight roles to promote sexual and reproductive health and rights in the region. These are very pertinent and important objectives. I hope you will accord them adequate time for discussion and that you will be able to reflect and come up with workable recommendations around these objectives.

Ladies and Gentlemen

We are not short of a policy environment to facilitate our work in bringing higher up the scale issues of reproductive health population and development. We have Maputo Plan of Action, which is a forward looking policy framework for Africa whose main objective is universal access to RH services. We have the Abuja Declaration which pledged African countries to devote at least 15% of national budgets to health. We also have the Accra Agenda for Action which aims to ensure national ownership, alignment, harmonisation and accountability for aid effectiveness. What is refreshing and energising is that our countries, at the highest political level have ratified these policy frameworks. All these, and indeed many other frameworks I have not mentioned, put together, are simply about delivering a better Africa, a better world for the benefit of generations into the future. Despite clear policy frameworks, the overarching problem remains a lack of political will and commitment to support the implementation of these otherwise good policies. It is my duty therefore to remind you about these, so that you may be sensitized to the need to building synergies in your reflections during the deliberations of this meeting.

On this note my suggestion would be to urge you to bring to the limelight the issue of leadership commitment and support to addressing health equity. We should see political leaders engaged to enlist their commitment to health including Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) at country level. In this regard, it is gratifying that the organisers of this meeting have enlisted the participation of Members of Parliament (MPs) who play a very important role in this regard. Parliaments while playing your representative, legislative, budget appropriation and oversight roles can bring real difference in the policy environment for improving the reproductive health situation at country, regional and continental levels. I regard parliamentarians as key and pertinent stakeholders who can through their roles remove legal and administrative barriers to access to high quality health services, you can influence resource allocation and ensure clear budget lines and expenditures on health and you can also hold national governments to account on commitments they have made as well as ensure that funds from both the national budgets and donors are spent appropriately. The answers to addressing health issues including sexual and reproductive health problems that confront us are therefore not far-fetched.

I wish to encourage all participants at this meeting to engage in open, well-founded and rigorous debate, so that we can benefit from each other's experience and expertise. Let's have debates that are conducted in a constructive manner so that we can leave here by end of today with clear, implementable resolutions that benefit our people and lead to sustainable development. I have every confidence that with the level of expertise and intelligentsia we have in this room, this task will be achieved.

Before I conclude my speech, allow me to thank all those who in one way or another have participated in making this Regional meeting a success. The list is long; perhaps I should single out a few. These include the organizers of this meeting and those who contributed resources; PPD ARO, UNFPA, EQUINET, APHRC, SEAPACOH and the GOVERNMENT itself. To all of you I say "Thank you".

With these few opening remarks, I now have the honour and pleasure to declare this meeting officially opened and wish you successful deliberations.

I thank you for your attention.