

STATEMENT

BY

DR JOTHAM MUSINGUZI

DIRECTOR GENERAL NATIONAL POPULATION COUNCIL
SECRETARIAT, UGANDA

AT THE OPENING OF THE

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

ON

JUNE 29, 2016

AT

SPEKE RESORT MUNYONYO

Hon Paula Turyahikayo, the Session Chairperson,
Hon Minister of State for Finance in charge of Planning, Hon David Bahati,
The Executive Director, PPD, Dr Joe Thomas,
The Chairman, NEAPACOH, Dr Blessing Chebundo,
Representative of African Institute for Development Policy,
Acting UNFPA Country Representative Kampala
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 at the opening of the regional meeting of Parliamentary Committees of Health in Africa or otherwise called NEAPACOH. 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 also like to take this opportunity to welcome to Uganda our brothers and sisters who have come all the way from the different countries to attend this meeting.

I would like also to thank the Minister of State for Finance in charge of Planning 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 our endeavor. I also want to thank members of NEAPACOH together with other stakeholders – UNFPA, AFIDEP, STEP UP, EAHPRO who have provided support in one way or the other in the organization of this meeting. I should not miss this opportunity to congratulate the staff of PPD ARO, who were until just four months ago under my

purview, for having spearheaded this event with such fervor and enthusiasm that it deserves

The last time I interacted with parliamentarians in a meeting of this nature was in October 2014 when PPD ARO organized a NEAPACOH meeting that was held in this very hotel. I was then the Regional Director of PPD ARO and had the honour to host the meeting in collaboration with other partners. NEAPACOH meetings being annual, PPD ARO had planned to organize a similar meeting in November 2015 but it was never to happen because of the political electioneering events that were happening in the country then. I have since retired from PPD ARO and joined government of Uganda as a Director General for Uganda's National Population Council. I am therefore very honoured that I have been able to interact with you again, this time not as the host, but as a participant to this NEAPACOH meeting.

When we look at you honorable members of parliament, we perceive you as superior beings who hold special positions in society, and it is as such that we look at you as our representatives in the Parliament. When we hear and see you speaking at in Parliament, we feel our voice is being made more audible. Your voice is the voice of your constituencies, and is our voice and whenever we hear you, we always feel of dropping a note to you to remind you of our preoccupations and concerns. We do have trust in our representatives and we are convinced that our views and concerns would be heard, understood and taken care of seriously if they come from you. That is why we believe and are keenly devoted to working with parliamentarians as change agents and central players to the full implementation of international and regional agreements on sexual and reproductive health and rights. Our countries

have very good and clear policy frameworks but the overriding problem on our continent remains a lack of political will and commitment to support the implementation of these otherwise good policies. We, therefore, see a lot of hope in parliamentarians as vanguards to improve the implementation of policies and programmes, as well as resource allocations for reproductive health including family planning. Through legislating on good policies for health, appropriating funds for health programs and projects, and exercising your oversight roles in the implementation of health related policies and programs, we know you can make positive impact in the policy environment for improving the reproductive health situation at country, regional and continental levels.

I am aware that this meeting is organized as a follow-up to similar NEAPACOH meetings that have been held in Kampala since 2008. These meetings provide a platform for sharing progress made, challenges and lessons learned on achieving the RH/FP country commitments as well as enhancing accountability, political leadership and stewardship for the implementation of RH/FP frameworks in the region. This meeting is however special and unique in a way. This meeting which has been organized with the theme **“From Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): Challenges and Opportunities for Parliaments to enhance Reproductive Health/ Family Planning”**, could not have been organized any better and any later than ‘yesterday’, and latest today, after the world adopted the SDGs at the United Nations 9 months ago.

Like many countries, Uganda has been implementing the MDGs as a central plank of its development strategy since 2000. A number of MDGs targets have been achieved

including Goal 1 on eradicating extreme poverty and hunger; Goal 2 on achieving Universal Primary Education; Goal 3 on promotion of gender equality and empowerment of women as well as Goal 4 on reducing child mortality. In addition, the goal on combating the spread of HIV/AIDS, malaria and other diseases was one of the goals that the country was able to achieve. As you may all know President Museveni has been variously praised for his efforts in keeping the HIV/AIDS agenda high on the country's top priorities. Unfortunately, Goal 5 on the reduction of maternal mortality rates has however remained stubborn and a huge challenge, not only for Uganda, but for many countries especially the developing countries.

We therefore need to up our efforts. The post MDG agenda therefore requires strong leadership and government ownership. We need to reflect and understand the new global RH/FP context fully, while remaining committed to the unfinished business of the MDGs. With the objectives of providing space for Parliamentarians to understand the transition from the MDGs to the SDGs and specifically to have a common understanding of the challenges and opportunities for SRHR in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development this meeting is indeed very important and timely.

On behalf on 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 likeminded partners to providing an endearing space for visibility and implementation of the recommendations of this meeting.

Thank you All