

**SPEECH**

**BY**

**HON. DR STEPHEN MALLINGA  
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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**

**SEPTEMBER 28, 2010**

Honorable Deputy Speaker of Parliament of Uganda

The Regional Director, PPD Africa Regional Office, Dr Jotham Musinguzi

The Chairman, SEAPACOH, Dr Blessing Chebundo

The Deputy Executive Director, AIFDP

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 2010 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 honored.

Secondly, I would like to take this opportunity , on behalf of Uganda Government to 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 organizations 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 improve the 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, high level unmet need for reproductive health services 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.

### **Ladies and Gentlemen**

We are not short of a policy environment and frameworks to facilitate our work in bringing higher up the scale issues of reproductive health population and development. We have the ICPD PoA, we have the international agreed MDGs, 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, harmonization and accountability for aid effectiveness. What is refreshing and energizing 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.

We well know what needs to be done to improve overall health and reduce health inequalities. We need greater investments in primary and preventative health care, such as through programs like the Village Health Teams in Uganda, and we need more health personnel (human resources for health) to provide services. We also need to continue progress in making clean water and sanitation more widely available, particularly for the poor, as well as building on the commendable immunization programmes we continue to see in our regions.

Investing in family planning and reproductive health, however, rarely ranks high on the list of national priorities, which usually emphasize creating jobs and raising incomes. This lack of attention is counterproductive. Prioritizing women's reproductive health at a national level would help accelerate progress toward achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) adopted by the United Nations (UN) for improving people's lives and combating poverty.

The challenges to reaching the MDGs and scaling-up essential good health services include, health system, financial, and political constraints. As parliamentarians your role is central in working on these challenges by advocating for the MDGs as an opportunity to call for equitable access to effective health interventions for constituents. By also supporting mobilization of resources for health by debating the need, discussing the budgeting process, and advocating for alternative options for financing; revising and monitoring of existing health policies and putting laws and regulations in place, this for sure will make a difference in alleviating the status of these health related MDGs.

Amidst all the crises that have gripped Africa, shines the hope of a better future. The uniqueness of our natural and human resources gives us an indisputable lead over the rest of the world. It is my firm conviction that by forging and invigorating partnerships between and among cross - sections of the society, we will be able to respond to the challenges and opportunities that confront us and that health will be promoted effectively in social justice and equity. We believe in our own potentials and capacities, and together we will reshape the health environment of Africa, and better the quality of life of our brothers and sisters in the Continent.

Today, we have come together to discuss and agree to an agenda for how we can work towards repositioning family planning and reproductive health as key strategy in the development agenda in the region. Through doing this, we will make a commitment, not only amongst ourselves, but to our people. We must not let them down. Access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive health services is among the challenge that must be faced in our path to development. In each of our countries, we need to focus on the most vulnerable and overlooked populations and issues and ensure that a just, equitable, and sustainable development is the one we bring about, with focus on women and children.

This meeting provides also an opportunity, among others, to discuss the promises made at Abuja in 2001 and Maputo in 2006. Yet, as you will learn, very few countries, including Uganda, have fulfilled yet these promises. I call upon each of you, in your roles as a policymaker committed to health, to ask your leaders and each other where the commitment to these promises is.

This meeting and its outcomes are very timely. The outcome document of this meeting should not only be relevant, but challenging to all parliamentarians throughout the region. When you return home, you must bring the support of your colleagues to these essential issues. It is the lives of our people and future of our countries at stake. At stake, the future of our children, is what we have to consider.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your attention