

REMARKS BY AMBASSADOR JERRY P. LANIER

“Regional Meeting of Southern and Eastern Africa Alliance of Parliamentary Committees on Health (SEAPACOH): Repositioning Family Planning and Reproductive Health in the Southern and Eastern Africa Region”

Imperial Royale Hotel, Kampala, Uganda

Time: 9:00-10:30; Tuesday, September 27, 2011

Right Honorable Speaker of Parliament,

Honorable Members of Parliament,

Members of the Diplomatic Corps,

Officials of the Government of Uganda

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning. I would like to thank Partners for Population and Development for organizing this important meeting and inviting me to address the esteemed body of Parliamentarians gathered here today. The Government of the United States, through the United States Agency for International Development, is a proud sponsor of this meeting, which brings together influential policy leaders from across the region to discuss family planning and reproductive health.

I am thankful for the leadership and participation of the Honorable Blessing Chebundo of Zimbabwe, the Chair of this Alliance, and the Right Honorable Rebecca Kadaga, Uganda's Speaker of Parliament.

I applaud the commitment of African Parliamentarians to improve access to reproductive health and voluntary family planning. As you all know, every day, women and girls die from complications in pregnancy or child birth that could be easily prevented. Uganda has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, with about 435 deaths per hundred thousand live births each year. As humane and compassionate people, we cannot accept this injustice and allow women to needlessly die when we know have affordable tools to save them.

Family planning represents one of the most cost-effective public health initiatives available today. It prevents both maternal and child deaths by helping women space their births and bear children during their healthiest years. And it reduces the deaths of women from unintended pregnancies, not to mention on the unintended pregnancies themselves, which have given Uganda one the world's highest birth rates.

Secretary of State Hillary Clinton has been a longtime supporter of the rights of women - especially the right for women to plan their pregnancies. By empowering women to make decisions about how many children they want to have, and when, we will dramatically reduce the risks to their health. When women lead healthy, productive lives, their partners, families and communities are better able to care for their children.

As many of you know, Uganda has among the highest unmet need for family planning in all of sub-Saharan Africa. Forty-one percent of married Ugandan women would like to use family planning methods, but don't have access to services and supplies. This unmet need translates into women having, on average, 1.6 more children than they desire. The majority of these women live in rural Uganda. With the population of Uganda expected to more than double by 2050, the country urgently needs to scale-up proven, high-impact interventions to meet family planning needs.

Voluntary family planning has been at the core of the United States' approach to maternal and child health. President Obama has established family planning as a priority under the Global Health Initiative, which seeks to build strong partnerships both at the country and international levels. In Uganda, the American people

provide 21 million dollars to support family planning programs each year. The programs focus on contraceptive security, improved access, affordability, and quality of voluntary family planning services. The Governments of the United States and Uganda work in partnership with the private sector to increase family planning access for women and families through all available channels.

The health sector is the largest recipient of U.S. assistance in Uganda and as members of this Parliamentary Alliance, I know that the health of the people of East and Southern Africa is of paramount concern to you all. As leaders in your respective countries and the region, I urge you to ensure that strong government leadership in health and family planning is a top priority. The Government of the United States remains committed to improving the health of the people in the region, but we need to work together to enable host countries to accept more of the burden of support for ensuring the well-being of their citizens.

As Parliamentarians with influence over policy, budget, national dialogue, and development priorities, your role is critical in advancing family planning and reproductive health in the region.

Meeting Millennium Development Goal 5b and the Maputo and Abuja plans of action will require collective action from the Governments of East and Southern Africa, donors, researchers, community and non-governmental organizations. We look forward to the outcome of this meeting, and hope that it will bring renewed energy and commitment by all governments in the region to safeguard the lives of millions of women and families.

Thank you.