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THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

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PRESS STATEMENT ON INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2012

Thursday 8th March 2012 is International Women's Day and Uganda will join the rest of the world to mark this important day.

International Women's Day is a global day celebrating the economic, political and social achievements of women past, present and future.

The main venue for the national celebrations will be Nebbi District and function will be held under the theme: "**Connecting Girls, Inspiring Futures**"

This theme has been adopted from the United Nations proposed theme for 2012. The theme calls on the United Nations Member State to inspire the minds of girls for a future of equality, development and peace.

In our context as a country, the theme implores the government and other stakeholders to take further actions to empower the Girl child in order to improve the social and economic status of women. The theme is also appropriate for Uganda as it re-emphasizes the NRM Government's commitment to women's empowerment in all spheres.

And as Uganda celebrates the Golden Jubilee of Independence, we are also using this occasion to reflect on our monthly theme for the month of March: "**Woman, Uganda salutes you**".

As we celebrate this day we take pride in the fact that as a country, Uganda has continued to inspire the girl child through affirmative action programmes, the many outstanding challenges notwithstanding. Women of Uganda have registered commendable progress in the area of political participation and decision making hence increased voice in public affairs. The Constitution of Uganda, guarantees gender balance and fair representation of marginalized groups. Article 33 guarantees women the right to **affirmative action** for the purpose of redressing the existing imbalances. The affirmative action policy has expanded leadership opportunities for women. In addition to enabling them break through the glass ceiling, the policy has enabled them to exhibit their leadership capabilities and there by challenging a negative stereotyping on women leadership as a result, more and more women have been encouraged to venture into politics. This is an inspiration to the girls to aim for decision making and leadership positions. In the current Parliament, women stand at 35% and women ministers at 35%.

However we are mindful of the hurdles that still stand in the way of the full emancipation of the female gender. There is the challenge of the gap between policy and practice on gender equality provisions. The deeply entrenched patriarchal character of the institutions within which the women leaders operate, continue to undermine their efforts to make positive changes for their communities. Thus, in addition to focusing on the theme we also dedicate this day to addressing these challenges.

During the function to be presided over by his Excellency President Yoweri Museveni, we shall also be launching the Senior Citizens Grants and Vulnerable Family Support Grants under the Expanding Social Protection Programme in Nebbi district. Nebbi is one of the five districts that are coming on board to receive the grants in the next two months. The others are Apac, Katakwi, Moroto and Nakapiripirit. As you may be aware, the Ministry of Gender Labour

and Social Development is implementing this Programme in selected pilot districts as a Government of Uganda initiative.

The provision of direct income support is a key tool that complements our efforts to empower women and address their unique vulnerability. As you are aware, women play a critical role for providing the basic requirements for their families particularly children. Grandmothers, in particular, play an important role in caring for their grandchildren which enables working age parents to produce food for their families or enter the labour market. Unfortunately, because of poverty and vulnerability, women's resilience and ability to provide for their families is greatly reduced. According to the latest Uganda National Household Survey, 16 per cent of Ugandan children below 5 years are underweight while 38 per cent are stunted. Despite significant Government investments in health and education, the poorest and most vulnerable are failing to access basic services. Financial constraints are a key barrier to accessing health services yet sickness is cited as the major reason for dropping out of school. All this has wide ranging negative impacts on our children's future human capital and national development.

Therefore, ladies and gentlemen, the provision of Senior Citizens Grants and Vulnerable Family Support Grants will support poor and vulnerable women to provide better food and buy scholastic materials for their children, improve their access to health services, and provide a foundation on which to build productive livelihoods and support their families better.

Elsewhere there will be local celebrations in all districts in the country. Please join your district to mark this important day.

I wish you happy celebrations.

For God and my Country

HON. LUKIA ISANGA NAKADAMA (MP)

Minister of State for Gender and Culture

