



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

SPEECH

BY

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PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

ON THE OCCASION TO MARK

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY 2012

UNDER THE THEME

“CONNECTING GIRLS, INSPIRING FUTURES”

IN

NEBBI DISTRICT

MARCH 8TH 2012

H.E. the Vice President,

Rt. Hon Speaker of Parliament,

His Lordship, the Chief Justice,

Rt. Hon Prime Minister,

Rt. Hon. Leader of the Opposition,

Hon. Ministers,

Hon. Members of Parliament,

Distinguished Guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen.

I welcome you all to this year's International Women's Day celebrations, which is particularly significant as it is being

marked in the Golden Jubilee year of Uganda's Independence. The overall theme for the Golden Jubilee is **“Building a firm foundation for transformation.”** This is an inspirational theme for all Ugandans to focus on transforming their lives for the good of our country.

I am therefore pleased that we in Uganda have adopted the global theme guiding the celebrations, which is **“Connecting Girls, Inspiring Futures.”** This theme speaks for the strategic vision that the National Resistance Movement (NRM) Government has pursued over the years to ensure a prosperous future for the children of Uganda. The focus on the girl child is based on the fact that the social cultural context in which they are born and raised values the boy child more, thus disadvantaging the girl child. This situation is further aggravated by the poverty in which some of our people live. When choices have to be made, the girl child will most likely miss the opportunity.

Several Milestones have been achieved since the NRM Government came to power. Notable among these is achieving Universal Primary and Universal Secondary Education. These two policies introduced in 1997 and 2007 respectively have been a great inspiration to the girl child. The key aim of these policies is to increase enrollment in primary and secondary schools. Before UPE for example girls' enrollment in Primary school was at 24.6 %. This rose to the current 49.9%. Uganda is therefore on the path to

achieving Millennium Development Goal 2 of gender parity in Primary Education by 2015.

For better performance of the enrolled students, other supportive structures and conditions have been put in place. These include; recruitment of teachers, construction of class rooms and rehabilitation of facilities, reducing student to teacher ratio for improved learning, improved sanitation and water supply. All these initiatives have created a gender responsive learning environment which is a major achievement in the education sector.

Government has also expanded water supply in both rural and urban areas to 65% and 66% respectively. Access to clean and safe water facilitates, hygiene and sanitation in homes and communities enables girls to stay in school.

According to the Uganda Demographic and Health Survey (UDHS) 2006, the number of women who die due to pregnancy complications declined from 505 in 2001 to 435 per 100,000 in 2006, while the number of children who die before their first birthday reduced from 88 to 75 per 1000 live births during the same period. This is still below the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) targets on reducing maternal mortality to 131 deaths per 100,000 live births by 2015. Government is committed to continue putting in place measures to ensure that maternal mortality and morbidity is further reduced.

Government opened up space to allow women to participate in politics which has increased the numbers of women in leadership and decision making position. The number of women in high level political and decision making positions has increased gradually. For example in parliament, women representation has risen from 24.6% in 2001 to the present 34.9% in the 9th Parliament. This is an inspiration to girls.

Political space has also been opened for marginalized groups within the society. These include; the youth, Persons with Disability and the workers. The National Youth and Women Councils established in 1993 have groomed young leaders. Other mobilization efforts have been equally successful to the extent that the 9th parliament has been described as a “youthful” parliament with 19 young MPs being 30 year or below.

Government has initiated several youth focused services to promote their entrepreneurship and business acumen. An agreement for government to partner with three Commercial banks namely, DFCU, Stanbic and Centenary banks) has been signed to avail 25 billion shillings to youth. The fund offers start up capital for small and medium enterprises. The fund should enable youth to develop, improve and grow their businesses. Youth who are eligible should therefore take up this opportunity and we look forward to seeing female youth benefiting from this fund.

It is evident therefore that the Uganda of today is a better place for the Ugandan girl than the past. However we are still faced with barriers that prevent girls from unleashing their full potential. Some of the barriers include gender based violence (GBV) that occurs in the home, community, at school and in the work environment.

Practices such as early and forced marriages, early pregnancies which lead to the high drop-out rates among girls need to be prevented.

Defilement of girls goes on with impunity leading to many negative consequences including the likelihood of contracting HIV/AIDS. I call upon all community members, law enforcement agencies, health workers, judiciary, faith based and cultural leaders to join hands to declare zero tolerance to GBV.

Enforcement of the Domestic Violence Act of 2010 which is now guided by a set of regulations is one of the priorities of Government. In December, last year, I joined my colleagues, the Heads of State and Government of the International Conference on the Great Lakes Region (ICGLR) to sign the Kampala Declaration on Sexual and Gender Based Violence on 16th December 2011.

This historic event brings to the fore a commitment at highest level of Government to address Gender Based Violence which should be a basis to take action for total elimination of this vice.

The fight against HIV/AIDS and STDs particularly among children and young people is one that we have fought hard. From the time of the initial AIDS Control Programme (ACP) we managed to reduce the rate of infection to the present 3.5 % from a high of 17% in 1990s. Our vision is to ensure an HIV free generation; hence we are inspiring young girls to remain alive for the future.

Government together with Civil Society, Faith based organizations, Cultural institutions and development Partners has put in place a comprehensive support mechanism for orphans and other vulnerable children (OVC). The programme has provided education, health and psychosocial support to over 8.3 million orphans country wide, 51% of whom are girls. I wish to thank all those who in one way or another are able to reach out and make the live of a child better.

I now want to address myself to the children and young people of this country both male and female. Over and above what Government is providing by way of services, you are the determinants of your own future. As the saying goes; the future is in your hands! It has been proven that the mindset is an important aspect for one's development and prosperity yet the National Development Plan identifies negative mindsets as one of the binding constraints to our development in Uganda. The children and youth should therefore strive to have positive mindsets that are oriented towards hard work, innovation and achieving set targets.

Let me take this opportunity once again to thank all Uganda's friends and development partners for their support to the people of this country and more especially the women and girls.

As we celebrate Women's day, I would also like to address the issue of Social Protection for Senior Citizens - most of whom - in fact, 59 per cent are women. The majority of these women are without any other form of income security as their lower participation in the formal economy reduces women's pensions and savings.

Although we have a very rich tradition of supporting our older people, the country is modernising at a fast pace. As a result of urbanisation and cultural changes, many older people cannot be assured of the support they once expected yet grandparents continue to play a key role in supporting their families. Grandmothers play a particularly important role in caring for their grandchildren which enables working age parents to produce food for their families or enter the labour market. They continue to guide and inculcate Ugandan cultural values in their children and grandchildren, as well as preserving Uganda's rich and diverse cultures. And, all too often, grandmothers continue to bear the burden of care for our nation's orphans. As they do so, many of them suffer from a range of chronic diseases if left untreated, can be permanently disabling. Our senior citizens have faced these challenges alone for too long.

The NRM Government acknowledges the contribution that Senior Citizens have made towards building this country. My Government therefore aims to restore the dignity of our senior citizens, empower them to participate in social and community life and enable them to continue supporting their families, through in particular the provision of Senior Citizens Grants.

I am therefore happy today to launch the Senior Citizens Grants of UGX 23,000 per month for all older persons above the age of 65 in Nebbi. The Senior Citizens of Nebbi will today join their colleagues in Kaberamaido, Kiboga and Kyenjojo districts who have been receiving the Senior Citizen Grant since October 2011. The Senior Citizens of Apac, Katakwi, Moroto, Nakapiripirit, Amudat, Kyegegwa, Kyankwanzi, Zombo, Napak and Kole will be enrolled by the end of June 2013.

The provision of these Senior Citizens Grants is a key tool that complements the NRM's efforts to empower women and address their unique vulnerabilities. Money in the hands of Uganda's grandmothers is likely to be invested in the welfare of their children and grandchildren – particularly benefitting our girl children.

Launching these grants in Nebbi today, represents a clear delivery on our Manifesto promises. Indeed, provision of Senior Citizens Grants is one of the key commitments in the NRM Manifesto. However, I would like to state clearly that

the Senior Citizens Grants are for all Senior Citizens-not only those who voted for NRM.

As our economy grows, I am convinced that the expansion of the Senior Citizens Grant from the current pilot scheme in 14 districts to the whole country will be within our means soon. It will be by such investments that the NRM Government will demonstrate its commitment to ensuring that all Ugandans – young and old - are able to contribute to and benefit from Uganda's socio-economic transformation.

I therefore congratulate the Ministry of Gender Labour and Social Development and thank our Development Partners for supporting Government to take this important step towards delivering on the NRM's commitment to support our Senior Citizens across the country.

I am also pleased to launch a biannual publication **“Uganda Woman”** produced by the Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development under the United National Programme on Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment. The magazine will serve as reference documentation on issues of gender equality and women's empowerment in Uganda; which issues should be able to inspire the girl child.

I extend my best wishes to you all for a happy Women's Day, continued progress in this Golden Jubilee year and in the coming years.

“FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY”