



THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

SPEECH

BY

**HIS EXCELLENCY YOWERI KAGUTA MUSEVENI, THE PRESIDENT OF THE
REPUBLIC OF UGANDA**

**ON THE OCCASION TO COMMEMORATE THE INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR OLDER
PERSONS**

VENUE: KYENJOJO DISTRICT HEADQUARTERS

DATE: 1ST OCTOBER, 2011

Hon. Ministers

Members of Parliament

Your Excellencies the Ambassadors

Resident District Commissioners

District Local Council V Chairpersons

Development Partners

Religious leaders

Senior Citizens

Invited Guests

Ladies and Gentlemen

Today I am very happy to join the senior citizens of this country to celebrate the International Day for Older Persons. I want to take this opportunity to acknowledge the immense contributions that senior citizens have made to our country's development. This is something that is not recognized every day.

I also want to acknowledge the challenges experienced by many of our senior citizens. Although we have a rich tradition of supporting our older people, the country is modernizing at a fast pace. As a result of urbanization and cultural changes, many older people cannot be sure of receiving the level of support they once expected. To make matters worse, older people continue to bear the burden of caring for orphans. As they do so, many older people suffer from a range of chronic diseases which, left untreated, can be permanently disabling. Indeed I am aware that 64.5% of our senior citizens have

a disability. Moreover, 93% of older people receive no pension and therefore live without any form of financial security. When these factors combine, many of this country's senior citizens experience poverty, social exclusion, discrimination and a life without dignity or income security.

Older people have faced these challenges alone for too long. The NRM Government recognizes that as people reach old age, basic income security is critical to older people's well-being, dignity and their continued participation in the social and economic development of their communities. The Government therefore is determined to empower older people and ensure that income insecurity and all forms of neglect and abuse of older persons are addressed.

For example the Local Governments Act specifically provides for representation of older persons in Local Government Councils. This affirmative action is to ensure that senior citizens participate in the decision making processes right from the village level. In addition, everything possible is being done to ensure that the National Council for Older Persons' Bill is passed and that electoral colleges for the election of representatives of older persons in the Local Councils are established. Government has also implemented initiatives such as the Functional Adult Literacy Programme to empower older persons who missed formal education. Another important programme is NAADs where Senior Citizens and their

families can contribute to improving Uganda's agricultural productivity.

However, I recognize that, in order to effectively participate in these development programmes, good health for older persons is essential. Of course, to reach old age in good health requires individual efforts. The responsibility of individuals is to maintain a healthy lifestyle. Our responsibility as Government is to create a supportive environment that enables the advancement of health and well-being into old age. Older persons are fully entitled to have access to preventive, curative care and rehabilitation. Moreover, my Government is committed to ensuring that health services are equipped with the facilities and skilled personnel necessary to meet the special needs of the older population.

However, it is time to do more. Ladies and Gentlemen, I want to draw your attention to the fact that the Constitution of the Republic of Uganda has always recognised the rights of senior citizens and the responsibility of government to promote their welfare. Indeed, the National Objectives and Directive Principles of State Policy of the Constitution stipulates that; ***“The State shall make reasonable provision for the welfare and maintenance of the Aged”***.

Therefore the launch of the Senior Citizens Grant today is a clear step in the direction of addressing our constitutional obligation. The

time has come for Uganda to start developing a comprehensive social protection system which provides a basic level of income security for all its senior citizens and other vulnerable groups such as persons with disabilities. Such systems have been key to the social and economic transformation of many countries around the world especially those that have graduated into middle income status. Indeed countries such as Brazil and South Africa have implemented national Senior Citizen's Grants and other social protection schemes as a key part of their national development strategies.

In these countries, Senior Citizens Grants have been consistently shown to help older people meet their basic needs, contribute to their communities and families, access health care and other government services and remain productive – even in to their later years. Moreover, given the burden of care for orphans borne by the elderly, Senior Citizens Grants also help improve the nutrition and educational attainment of many of the vulnerable children in their care.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Senior Citizens Grant is one of the key programmes that we pledged to deliver in the NRM Manifesto. However, I want to clearly state that this programme is for all senior citizens – not only those who voted for NRM. Its launch today is clear evidence that we are serious about living up to our commitment to Improve Service Delivery.

Let me once again take this opportunity to appreciate the contributions that senior citizens have made to our country. Some of them participated in various struggles to liberate our country. Others have struggled to support their grandchildren, sons and daughters - especially those who have been affected or infected by HIV/AIDs. As you have done so, you have continued to guide and inculcate good cultural values to our children and preserved our rich and diverse cultures.

Finally, let me take this opportunity to express my appreciation to our development partners. With their support, this Government today is able to take an important first step in the development of a national Senior Citizens Grant. As our economy grows, I am convinced that the expansion of the current pilot scheme beyond the 14 districts will be within our means. It will be by such investments, that this Government will achieve its objective of national social and economic transformation. I therefore encourage Senior Citizens to use their monthly Grants wisely and to participate in other government programmes. In doing so, the Senior Citizens Grant will help us ensure that senior citizens too can benefit from ***boona bagaggawale***.

FOR GOD AND MY COUNTRY.