

OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA

3rd April 2020

H.E. General Yoweri Kaguta Museveni (Rtd)
President of the Republic of Uganda
Office of the President
P.O. Box 7168
Kampala, Uganda

Your Excellency

ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE SERVICES MUST BE AT THE CENTER OF COVID19 RESPONSE

Your Excellency, we commend you for the efforts that you are undertaking to ensure that Ugandans remain safe from COVID19. We also thank you for providing the leadership at the highest level, together with the Prime Minister's Office, the Ministry of Health, all the Security Organs, Uganda AIDS Commission and all Development partners who are spending tireless nights to make sure Ugandans remain free from COVID19 and those who are infected are treated.

The Uganda HIV Civil Society Organizations have taken seriously your guidance and are working with our communities to ensure compliance. We have also come up with our own structure to deliver on our mandate, contributing to the government efforts. These include but are not limited to community mobilisation, messaging on prevention and control of COVID19 and providing emergency services where we are able.

On behalf of our communities, we hereby write to you to express our deep dismay at the alarming difficult situations that women and children are finding themselves in as they try to access health care services during this period of the lock-down. This has led to the several deaths of pregnant mothers and their babies that have been reported in several parts of Uganda. We are daily receiving outcry from several people especially people living with HIV and other non communicable diseases who are unwell and not able to travel to access medical services.

Your excellence, your people may survive COVID19 but unfortunately many may not survive other emergencies. Pregnancy for example may not allow the pregnant women to even remember the emergency numbers provided. Labour pains may come in the middle of the night when even the RDCs are not available in their offices. A sickly child for example with a temperature would need immediate attention by a health worker and for any mother, they would need to rush with whatever means available to save the life of the child and also prevent the child from long term effects on his/her health. This again cannot wait for permission to be secured.

With due respect to your directive on 30th March 2020 calling on the public to seek permission from the RDCs in case of any emergencies and on 2nd April 2020, where the Ministry of Transport emphasized that Police Officers should allow pregnant women to travel to hospitals, without clearance to move, this remains challenging. Also interpretation at implementation level hasn't followed logic and therefore even when a vehicle is carrying a person who is in a critical condition, some security officers have gone ahead to impound the vehicle, further risking the life of the occupant.

Your Excellency, though in your directive, it was clear that that violence in homes is not an emergency, your Excellency, we want to bring to your attention that that reports show this has gone at increased rate and we are losing lives due to violence.

We therefore propose that:

- 1) Power is decentralized to the Local Council Chairpersons to handle any emergency cases of sick people, pregnant women and children that need immediate attention to hospitals as opposed to RDCs and RCCs who might not be readily available and within reach. The structure of LC1 systems works so well to the extent that almost all LC Chairpersons know their residents and when it comes to emergencies, they should be the first to be approached and we trust they will do a good job of prevention of COVID19 and addressing preventable deaths. The RDCs should be left to handle situations that are non-emergency in nature;
- 2) Ambulances and cars are readily available at the community level and where such is not possible, through the LC Chairperson's authorisation, personal vehicles by well wishers should be allowed including boda bodas as long as they have a letter of authority from the LC1 Chairperson, who in case of doubt can be called;
- 3) We are happy that the medical personnel have been cleared for permits to travel without restrictions. We request that the process of issuing permits is fast tracked;
- 4) Access to food and other essential commodities is critical during this period of the lockdown. We commend the government for efforts towards this. We however are asking your excellence that guidelines and or a statutory instrument be issued in this process, otherwise the intended people may be left out. Groups that may miss out of this exercise are People living with HIV, yet nutritional support is critical for adherence to treatment, their prevention of COVID19 and prevention of further HIV infections.
- 5) We recommend that survivors of violence should be categorized as those in emergency need - they need to access medical related services and police for justice.

Sincerely,

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For and on behalf of Uganda HIV Civil Society Organizations



NAFOPHANU



International Community
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