

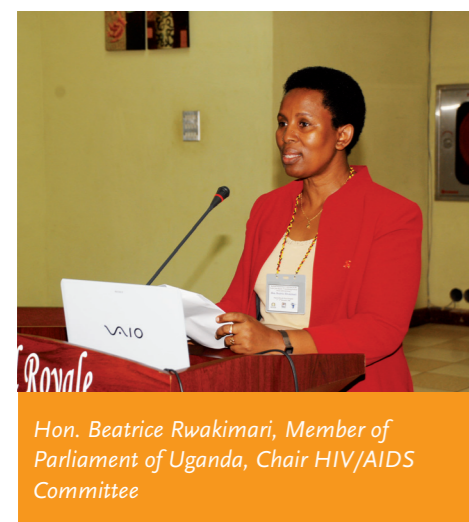
CLOSING REMARKS

Hon. Baroness Northover, Member of the House of Lords, United Kingdom, emphasised in her closing remarks the importance political will in promoting the wellbeing of children. She noted that ratifying Conventions should go hand in hand with the institution of legal framework and budgetary allocations to support policies and programmes for children, "There are many challenges in Africa: there

is poverty; HIV/AIDS and conflict. It is often in conflict communities that you do not have the rights of a child respected. Many times child abuse is associated as much with poverty as with conflict and turmoil", she stated.

Hon. Beatrice Rwakimari, Member of the Ugandan Parliament thanked AWEPA for their support to all the regional conferences on children. She called upon the participants to work diligently to implement their National Parliamentary Plans of Action and to continue to support the well-being of the children of Africa.

Speaking on behalf of the Speaker of EALA, **Hon. Abdirahin Abdi**, **Hon. Lydia Wanyoto** congratulated the participants for having updated their National Plans of Action for OVC. She commended the African Policy Forum for launching the African Report on Child Well-being, which she said will act as guide to the action plans and programmes implemented by the different Parliaments. ●



Hon. Beatrice Rwakimari, Member of Parliament of Uganda, Chair HIV/AIDS Committee

Programme Descriptions

The Regional Conference in Kampala in December 2009 provides an important follow up to the Regional Parliamentary Conference for the Great Lakes Region: "Towards an AIDS free generation", which took place in Kampala, October 2008. The conference is the fifth in a series of regional conferences on HIV and AIDS, with a focus on OVC issues. All these conferences are part of the theme "Fighting HIV and AIDS" of a wider AWEPA programme entitled "Fostering the Values of Democracy in the

Great Lakes Region", funded by the Dutch Government.

The Regional Conference is also organised in the framework of AWEPA's EALA Programme. The EALA is made up of representatives from the five Member States from the East African Community (Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Rwanda and Burundi) The EALA has seven Standing Committees, and the Committee dealing with HIV and AIDS issues, is the Standing Committee on General Purposes. The programme with the EALA is funded by the Irish government. ●



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About AWEPA

AWEPA is an international parliamentary association which works in cooperation with African Parliaments to strengthen parliamentary democracy in Africa, keep Africa high on the political agenda in Europe, and facilitate African-European parliamentary dialogue. From South Sudan to South Africa, AWEPA has served as a unique tool for complex democratisation operations. ●

The Way Forward

AWEPA will emphasise on its work the issue of the well-being of the girl child, with a special focus on the practice of Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting (FGM/C). AWEPA is preparing a "Parliamentary Campaign towards the abandonment of FGM/C", which will be launched during the AWEPA EU-Presidency seminar in Brussels in October 2010. This campaign will be linked to the Joint Programme of UNFPA and UNICEF 'Female Genital Mutilation/Cutting: Accelerating Change'. More information on the campaign and its activities can be soon found at the AWEPA website. ●

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Regional Parliamentary Conference for the Great Lakes Region: "Consolidating Political Will for Child Well-being"

KAMPALA, UGANDA, 1-2 DECEMBER 2009



Parliamentarians from the Great Lakes Region shared their actions undertaken, and committed themselves again to renewed action plans on how they, and their Parliaments, can contribute towards a more child friendly policy in their countries.

In order to keep the focus on parliamentary action on children and their well-being, and to keep the momentum after the five years campaign AWEPA had with UNICEF and others on Children and AIDS, AWEPA organised, together with the East African Legislative Assembly (EALA) and the Ugandan Parliament a Regional Parliamentary Conference focused on "Consolidating Political Will for Child Well-being". This conference was attended by more than hundred participants, including Members from six African Parliaments from the Great Lakes Region and EALA, as well as European Parliamentarians, development partners, members of civil society and international organisations, experts, and representatives from media and AWEPA.



Hon. Jessica Alupo, State Minister for Youth and Children's Affairs, Uganda

The conference provided an important follow up to the Regional Parliamentary Conference for the Great Lakes Region: "Towards an AIDS free generation", which took place in Kampala in October 2008. The parliamentarians shared with their colleagues in the region what they have done in each country since the conference of October 2008. During the working group session the current National Parliamentary Plans of Action (NPPA) for OVC were discussed and reviewed and the updated NPPA for OVC was presented in the plenary. In addition, the conference sought to further define parliamentary action towards a more child friendly policy. The participants were informed on the current situation of child well-being in Africa by launching the report "The African Report on Child Well-being: How child-friendly are African governments?" and on the situation of violence against the girl child, focusing on Female Genital Mutilation (FGM). ●

Results

NATIONAL PARLIAMENTARY PLANS OF ACTION (NPPA) FOR OVC

Examples of action points from the different revised NPPAs include calls for parliamentarians to:

- Harmonise the Sexual Offences Act with the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Act (Kenya);
- Advocate, by all the parliamentarians, to form HIV and AIDS Committees in their constituencies (Uganda);
- Execute oversight over the implementation of the laws related to the rights and protection of the children, and the fight against HIV (Rwanda);
- Organise a parliamentary day on the

theme 'Consolidating Political Will for Child Well-Being' (Burundi);

- Raise awareness in the country about two laws: the People Living with and affected by HIV/AIDS (PLWH) Protection Law, and the Child Protection Law (Democratic Republic of Congo);
- Write policy paper on Children Affected by AIDS (Southern Sudan).

As a result of the conference and other related events AWEPA supported in Uganda, a few weeks after the conference, the Parliament of Uganda passed the Prohibition of Female Genital Mutilation Bill, signed by the President of Uganda in March 2010. ●

Background

Most of the countries in Africa signed and ratified the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child (ACRWC) and many governments have increased their budget allocations to, for children crucial, sectors as health and education. Despite this progress, few countries have managed to fulfill their pledges made in Abuja in 2001 to allocate 15% of the annual budget to the improvement of the health sector. As a consequence of this, too many children die before they reach the age of five. Another concern is the huge and increasing number of orphans in Africa, largely due to the HIV and AIDS

>>> pandemic. It is expected that in 2010 African orphans are projected to number more than the populations of Uganda, Burundi and Rwanda together [the above text is based on figures mentioned in the African Report on Child Well-being 2008].

Parliamentarians, as custodians of democracy and human rights, and as representatives of the voice of children, have a central responsibility to enact

OPENING SESSION

Hon. Abdirahin Haithar Abdi, Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly, started his presentation by saying that the theme of the conference signifies the lack of political will in the Great Lakes Region to address the concerns of children. Children's rights are widely abused as a result of conflict in the region, and the failure to enforce laws to protect and advance their interests, he stated. Hon. Abdi mentioned the struggle for the emancipation of women championed by members of EALA, which has had a positive impact on the rights of the girl child. Hon. Abdi concluded by making an appeal to all the parliamentarians to double their efforts and create synergies to ensure a bright future for the African child, and he declared the conference officially open.



Hon. Abdirahin Haithar Abdi, Speaker of the East African Legislative Assembly

In the opening speech of **Hon. Edward Ssekandi**, Speaker of the Parliament of Uganda, delivered by Hon. Beatrice Rwakimari, Member of the Ugandan Parliament, the Speaker stressed the need to identify practical measures for scaling up support to communities, to provide an environment where children and their families affected by HIV and AIDS can be supported and their rights upheld. Hon. Ssekandi pointed out that the Parliament of Uganda has put in place Parliamentary Committees on Gender, Social Services,

legislation, pass budgets and hold their government accountable. Political will and commitment to increase the state of child well-being in Africa is needed, in the interests of the whole society. Parliaments clearly need to act to place children at the centre of policy priorities. Children's views are rarely heard or considered in political processes, so parliamentarians must voice the concerns of children and insist on government action •

HIV/AIDS and Equal Opportunities aiming to:

- monitor the mainstreaming of OVC in all Ministries and Government Departments;
- advocate for increased resources for efficient service delivery;
- lobby for the updating and harmonisation of the legal framework for the protection of OVC;
- conduct community sensitization for improved psycho- social support for OVC; and
- scrutinise policies, and where necessary propose policy changes.

Ms. Anne Attard, the Chief of Operations, UNICEF Uganda, pointed out the need for combating child poverty through a comprehensive package of social protection interventions which are: multi-sectoral; have a long term perspective in addressing the needs of children and their care givers; and are supported by laws and policies that create an enabling environment for children. Birth registration is equally important for children and should be encouraged in all the partner states, she added.

In his opening remarks **Dr. Jan Nico Scholten**, President of AWEPA, applauded the African Child Policy Forum for compiling "the African Report on Child Well-being", which provides the first ever "Child Well-being Index" on the performance of the African Governments' response to child issues. He congratulated Kenya and Rwanda who, despite their relevantly low GDP, were rated the best performing governments in the Great Lakes Region, saying that "the Report is evidence that government response to child issues in Africa is more a matter of political will, than limited economic capacity". In addition, Dr. Scholten drew the participants'

Parliamentary Action for Vulnerable Children affected by HIV and AIDS

The first plenary served as a platform to discuss the progress since the Regional Conference of October 2008. Examples of actions by the region's parliaments are, among others:

- The Sexual Offences Act and the HIV and AIDS Prevention and Control Act are in place (Kenya);
- Parliament passed the Trafficking in Persons and the Domestic Violence Bill in 2009 (Uganda);
- The introduction of a "National Day for Children", which is an annual forum for Children's Rights and responsibilities (national slogan "take every child as your own") (Rwanda);
- A "Prevention of Mother to Child Transmission (PMTCT)" programme is in place in health centres and hospitals (Burundi);
- Parliament passed two laws: People Living with and affected by HIV/AIDS (PLWH), and the Child Protection Law (Democratic Republic of Congo);
- The Gender Policy Bill and Child Rights Bill have been passed in Parliament (Southern Sudan)
- Organisation of draft-Bill preparatory meetings for an HIV/AIDS Bill along the lines of the Southern African Development Community (SADC) model law (EALA). •

attention to the negative cultural practice of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), which poses a violation of the rights of the African girl child. He concluded by calling upon the participants to share the progress made on the implementation of the National Parliamentary Plans of Action (NPPAs) for OVC, stating that Members of Parliament cannot afford to be silent witnesses, as the lives of children are at stake. •



Dr. Jan Nico Scholten, President of AWEPA

HARMFUL CULTURAL PRACTICES AGAINST THE GIRL CHILD: THE CASE OF FEMALE GENITAL MUTILATION

Hon. Dora Byamukamaon, Member of EALA Uganda, and Secretary General of EALA's Women's Forum, began by identifying FGM and the various forms in which it is practiced. She followed up by introducing the physical, psychological and social impacts of FGM on girls and women. Several strategies have been put in place to abandon FGM, Hon. Byamukama explained, one of which is advocating for the enactment of a law. Hon. Byamukama foresees other important action points for parliamentarians, such as to initiate research and to link up with Civil Society Organisations (CSOs); create awareness through media; and to provide a budget to prevent FGM and address its consequences. Hon. Byamukama stated that a law and education alone cannot change people's behaviour. The abandonment of FGM requires a prolonged strategy including sensitisation through schools and institutions, she added.

POLICY AND PRACTICE ON CHILD WELL-BEING

Mr. David Mugawe, the Deputy Executive Director of the African Child Policy Forum (ACPF) presented the findings of the African Report on Child Well-being 2008, ranking all African governments on their child friendliness. The "Child Friendly Index" was developed with 40 indicators with data from 52 states and indicated a substantial increase in health expenditure and reduction in child deaths attributable to preventable and treatable illnesses. Despite the progress, challenges remain. The African Report on Well-Being 2008 recommends that African governments should:

- Combat child illness and death by increasing their national health budgets to as high as 20% of government expenditure or a minimum of 9%;
- Raise the proportion of GDP that goes to education to as high as 13% with a minimum of 4.3%;
- Combat orphanhood by interventions to keep parents alive and make Anti-Retroviral Treatment (ART) widely available.

Kenya and Rwanda were congratulated for being among the 11 friendliest countries which was accomplished through appropriate legal instruments supporting the wellbeing of children, budgetary allocations for children, and availability and access to child services.

Mr. Frank Kayitare, Project Officer of AWEPA, presented to the participants the case of the Pan-African Parliament Women's Caucus (WC) as an example of parliamentary efforts towards the abandonment of FGM in Africa. The PAP-WC conducted a fact finding mission on FGM in Ethiopia in August 2009. The PAP-WC made recommendations for the documentation of best practices in Africa to be shared at parliamentary level. Furthermore, the PAP-WC has come up with frameworks for a booklet and guide on what parliamentarians can do to promote FGM abandonment. Following the presentation, participants were shown a film depicting the trauma a young girl goes through during the process of FGM. Mr. Kayitare remarked that this practice is the worst form of violence against a child.

Hon. Beatrice Lagada, Chairperson of the Gender and Social Services Committee of the Parliament of Uganda, shared the Committee's findings on FGM during a recent field visit to Eastern Uganda. She pointed out that FGM is a gender issue with men exerting pressure on women to continue the practice so as to fulfil their selfish ends. Women in Eastern Uganda continue in a vicious cycle of poverty and ignorance, because the practice draws girls out of school at an early age and encourages early marriages. Hon. Lagada noted that whole communities are involved in the practice, and criminalising FGM may not be very practical. She called upon the parliamentarians to advocate against the practice and to promote community sensitisation about its effects. •

Discussion

During the discussion the participants called upon the governments in the region to end the traumatic practice of FGM and the different faces of FGM were brought up as follows:

- **FGM as a gender issue:** In the case of Eastern Uganda, women revealed that FGM is forced on them by men. Therefore, men must be involved in the preventative initiatives.
- **FGM as an economic issue:** The "surgeons" livelihood should be provided for as an incentive for them to stop the practice. A punitive law may not be effective; instead initiatives should be put in place to reward change.
- **FGM as a cultural issue:** FGM is a culture entrenched in the communities. The mothers, who should stand up for their daughters, do not see why their children should be any different; moreover, young girls who do not undergo FGM are often stigmatised and psychologically tortured.
- **FGM as a religious issue:** There are communities that consider FGM as religious ritual. In Europe, families send their children back home to practice FGM. Even when threatened with imprisonment, the practice is still not abandoned. •