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STATEMENT
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NEW YORK – DECEMBER 6, 2016
AUTISM IN AFRICA; LIFE SAVING AWARENESS:
WHILE IMPLEMENTING
AGENDA 2030

New York, December 6, 2016

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Chairperson,

Excellences,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the outset, I would like to thank ENG. AJA EZE FOUNDATION for organizing this workshop to raise awareness about Autism in Africa. Autism is an unknown disability in most of our society in Africa.

In Uganda persons with Autism do not fit into any known category of disability and in most cases, they are often classified by people as victims of mental sickness, witchcraft or bad omen to the family. This group is subjected to psychiatric services and confinement, and also a good number of them are confined to mental hospitals and others are treated with traditional remedies which often results into brain damage.

Due to lack of knowledge and awareness about Autism, facilities and services have not been developed to cater for their needs, so they are mixed with children with diverse disorders. This eventually affects their development as they grow into adulthood.

There is need to expand awareness campaign to all people in our society that, autism is a neurophysical disorder different from other mental disorders to demystify the perception of witchcraft/bad omen associated to this condition.

Another big challenge is, even family members who are aware and informed about the Autistic condition of their dear ones can't financially afford the therapy.

Chairperson,

In Uganda (Article 35.1) the Constitution ensures the protection and respect for the rights of persons with disabilities to realize their full mental and physical potential. We have also put in place national policy framework for intervention for all persons with disabilities including autism.

In that regard, the Government of Uganda in conjunction with civil society organizations including Tunaweza Children's center, Empower Autistic Children Uganda(EACU) has come up with modest facilities to provide services for autistic children beside children with other forms of disabilities like down syndrome, and cerebral palsy.

At these centers children are provided with free diagnostic services for child psychiatric disorders on the autistic spectrum.

They also provide basic services to help autistic children develop a level of self-care, social and communication skills as a major step in integrating them in society.

They also receive different forms of therapy including speech and language therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy and social therapy. The main objective is to help the autistic child build talents and skills to be able to live a normal life in society.

Chairperson,

Given that these centers are still very few, Uganda government is supporting the Autism Awareness Campaign and will work closely with all relevant stakeholders to develop among others, good education programmes and health care services for children suffering from autism to improve their quality of life.

Chairperson,

In conclusion, the future of autistic children lies in the hands of those who closely support and understand them. Continuous education to increase knowledge and awareness about Autism is essential as this will promote early recognition and interventions in affected children.

We need to know their abilities and support them to develop their talents to be able to live a better life.

I thank you.