First National Meeting of CSOs of Persons with Albinism convenes for a National Action Plan

By Bernard AMWINE/UN Human Rights

"Persons with albinism in Uganda need support. Their experiences of discrimination are multiple and intersecting. Short, medium and long term measures must be put in place for relief, rehabilitation and development initiatives," said Ms. Ikponwosa Ero, the UN Independent Expert on the enjoyment of human rights by persons with albinism, visiting Uganda in her personal capacity.

Ms. Ero was speaking at the First National Meeting of Civil Society Organizations of Persons with Albinism in Uganda, organized by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) in partnership with the Open Society Initiative for Eastern Africa (OSIEA) on 11 and 12 September 2019 at Lake Victoria Serena Resort Hotel. The meeting brought together 23 leaders of Civil Society Organizations of persons with albinism; 14 males and 9 female drawn from the districts of Kampala, Kayunga, and Luwero in the central region, Lira in the north, Isingiro in south western, Serere in north eastern and Mbale in the east - to discuss common challenges and explore national strategic interventions towards the promotion of their human rights.

The discussions were building on the Regional Action Plan on Albinism in Africa (2017-2021), which was adopted as African Union policy in July 2019. Participants identified eight key priorities for intervention, including health, education, awareness-raising and economic empowerment of persons with albinism. They decided to establish a Task Force with a view to develop a National Action Plan on Albinism in Uganda (NAP). According to Ms. Ero, adopting a NAP is necessary to effectively address the discrimination and other human rights violations faced by persons with albinism in Uganda.

“Adopting a national action plan is necessary to enable persons with albinism in Uganda to enjoy their human rights without hindrances that come with lack of knowledge about the
condition.” She noted. The National Action Plan is a compendium of specific measures that concretize and contextualize the Regional Action Plan at both national and local level.

Sharing experiences and good practices from the region, Ms. Ero said that whereas National Action Plans for persons with albinism have been developed in neighboring Kenya and Tanzania, they need a dedicated budget from Government in order to succeed.

Speaking at the same meeting, Robert Kotchani, Country Representative of the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Uganda, noted that “Persons with Albinism remain largely a marginalized group and continue to suffer discrimination and other forms of violations of human rights.” He called for openness, honesty and creativity among CSOs of Persons with Albinism in working “tirelessly to promote and protect the rights of Persons with Albinism in Uganda.”

Participants shared experiences of the several challenges that persons with albinism in Uganda face, ranging from stigma, discrimination to lack of self-esteem and widely held stereotypes and myths, especially in rural areas. “Basic and simple acts of kindness, such as visiting Persons with Albinism in their homes, restores hope and make the struggle worth the effort”, noted Olive Namutebi, Chairperson of the Albinism Umbrella.

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