REMARKS AT 10th ANNIVERSARY
EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES
By Ms. Rosa Malango, UN Resident Coordinator
21 July 2020

Honourable Ministers
Development Partners
UN Heads of Agencies
Representatives from Non-Governmental Organisations, Youth and Women’s
groups, Private Sector, Academia, Media
Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the United Nations system in Uganda I am pleased to be joining the 10th Anniversary Celebration of the Equal Opportunities Commission.

The United Nations Charter promotes Equal Opportunities for all Human Beings. The Charter also aims to uphold fundamental human rights of all human beings and to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom. The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) have become the main pathway to achieve the aspirations of the UN Charter. The UN Secretary-General declared 2020 as the commencement of the Decade of Action for accelerating sustainable solutions to the world’s biggest challenges—ranging from poverty and gender to climate change, inequality and closing the finance gap.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affected the way we work but it has not affected the principles and values which stand at the core of the UN Charter. We stand in solidarity with the Government and People of Uganda and commend you for all the actions and efforts to curb the spread of the deadly COVID-19. We commend President Yoweri Museveni for his personal leadership and commitment to preventing the spread and responding to COVID-19 in Uganda. In seeking to overcome the COVID-19 outbreak in Uganda, it is essential to ensure that human rights remain at the centre of our efforts, both in terms of response to the outbreak, and the recovery from it.

The UN has engaged with the EOC which mandate cascades through all spheres of life, on a number of priority areas related to equality and non-discrimination, including persons with disabilities, persons with albinism, gender and equity budgeting.

Going forward, the EOC – in close cooperation with other human rights institutions, namely UHRC and NCD – will play a critical role in ensuring that no one is left behind as Uganda seeks to advance on the implementation of the SDGs.
This is more essential than ever, as Uganda is seeking to respond to and more importantly recover from COVID-19. The pandemic has had detrimental impact on the most marginalized and vulnerable in society, and concerted efforts are needed to ensure they are not falling further behind, but instead supported in such key areas as access to healthcare, education, food, livelihood and employment.

The EOC Tribunal function and public inquiries are important avenues for marginalized and vulnerable individuals to have their cases heard and seek redress. This includes discrimination in the workplace and in connection with business and human rights concerns.

As Uganda soon will launch the third phase of the National Development Plan, it is essential to ensure a people-centered approach to Uganda’s development efforts through the use of a Human Rights Based Approach to Development.

The Constitution of Uganda (1995) in its Preamble expresses the commitment to “build a better future by establishing a socio-economic and political order through a popular and durable national Constitution based on the principles of unity, peace, equality, democracy, freedom, social justice and progress”.

Uganda has a solid national legal and policy framework. The Constitution (1995), sets out clear obligations related to the promotion and protection of human rights in the country. As national institutions with human rights-related mandates, the EOC, UHRC and NCD are continuously issuing recommendations on how to further advance the implementation of human rights.

The recommendations and concluding observations issued by the human rights mechanisms at national, regional and international levels provide invaluable guidance that can inform our development efforts, including with regard to areas requiring further attention in Uganda, in particular as they relate to marginalised and vulnerable groups.

It is imperative that development is to be carried out in line with human rights - this is a key tenet of the 2030 Agenda. This Agenda’s overarching vision to “leave no one behind” and to “reach the furthest behind first” [1] recognizes the need to address inequalities, which is a core human rights question in the achievement of sustainable development. In adopting the 2030 Agenda, Member States resolved to, amongst others, “combat inequalities within and among countries; to build peaceful, just and inclusive societies; to protect human rights and promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls“.

Uganda’s Vision 2040 expresses that “Ugandans aspire to have unity in diversity and equal opportunities irrespective of gender, tribe, ethnicity or religion. Ugandans aspire for a progressive and developmental culture that blends traditional beliefs and national values.” Vision 2040 further outlines that “Ugandans aspire for a future in which men, women, youth, children, and persons with disabilities are empowered to participate as equal partners in development.”

The 2030 Agenda in paragraph emphasizes the “responsibilities of all States, in conformity with the Charter of the United Nations, to respect, protect and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms for all, without distinction of any kind as to race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, disability or other status.”

The EOC hence has a key role in reminding all relevant stakeholders about the specific areas requiring attention and concerted efforts to leave no one behind in Uganda.
The EOC provides important insights and recommendations on needed measures to effectively address discrimination faced by women and girls, persons with disabilities, including persons with albinism, persons living with HIV/AIDS, ethnic and indigenous minorities and other groups.

This includes making arrangements to ensure reasonable accommodation and the adoption of affirmative action measures to ensure that none of these groups remain left behind. Such measures must seek to ensure that members of these groups have equal opportunities to attain education, employment opportunities, health and other social services, allowing them to develop their full potential and live a life in dignity.

Significantly, we want to acknowledge the critical role that the EOC plays in ensuring that Uganda’s commitments to gender and equity are translated in concrete programmes and budget allocation. One of the key milestones was the passage of the 2015 Public Management Act, which made it compulsory for national and district budgets to address gender and equity in their planning and budgeting. The subsequent Gender and Equity Certificate, along with the assessment tools and guides, remains indispensable to propelling Uganda towards the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Due to the EOC’s:

- Investment in capacity building for gender and equity at district, national, and Parliamentary levels;
- Development of 16 clear Gender and Equity Compacts to guide sectors to address gender and equity issues specific to their sector;
- Development of a National compendium of Priority Gender and Equity Issues for local governments; and
- Enhanced capacity to conduct budget assessments to now cover all district local government;

among other successes, has led to overall improvements in sector gender and equity compliance since 2015. The national budget score currently stands at 61% compliance and a recent analysis conducted under the Spotlight Initiative to Eliminate Violence Against Women and Girls demonstrated overall improvement in most sector’s compliance with gender and equity requirements in 2019 as compared to 2018.

We look forward to our ongoing partnership with the EOC and continued efforts to strengthen compliance in planning and budgeting at all levels of government, as well as for expenditure accountability for gender and equity.

As the UN, we congratulate the EOC on its journey to date, and look forward to continuing our journey together in seeking to advance the rights and opportunities for all in Uganda.

[1] “As we embark on this great collective journey, we pledge that no one will be left behind. Recognizing that the dignity of the human person is fundamental, we wish to see the Goals and targets met for all nations and peoples and for all segments of society. And we will endeavour to reach the furthest behind first.” (Paragraph 4)