Remarks of the at the Launch of the Parliamentary Champions on the Adolescent Girl,

By Ms. Rosa Malango,

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Uganda

18th March 2017, Masulita Children’s Home, Wakiso
The First Lady of the Republic of Uganda and Minister of Education and Sports

Honorable Minister of State for Youth and Children Affairs

Honorable State Minister for Primary Education

Members of Parliament Present

UN Colleagues

Members of the Media

Girls and Boys

Ladies and Gentlemen

UWESO, OAFLA congratulations!

It is a great honour for me to join you all at this event to launch the work of the ‘Parliamentary Champions for the Adolescent Girl’ in Uganda. I will share some achievements and thoughts on action.
First, I would like to deeply appreciate the National Champion for Adolescent Girls, the First Lady of Uganda, for her tireless efforts to support the well-being and development of the girl-child in Uganda.

Investing in girls is critical for the development of Ugandan society and, Madame First Lady and Honourable Minister, your efforts to champion the rights of the Girl Child to a quality education, health, protection from violence, and participation, will greatly help to ensure Uganda’s journey to become an Upper Middle Income country by 2040 is accelerated. DHS 2016 survey; Immunization and prenatal care rates are highest in Karamoja. When we invest, it makes a difference.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Uganda has made significant progress in putting in place legal and policy frameworks to address gender inequalities and discrimination, which has created a more enabling environment to improve the well-being of the girl child. More specifically, the Constitution of Uganda promotes equality and protects girls. Protection of girls is further enshrined in other legislations, including the recently adopted Amendment of the Children’s Act. I take this moment to recognize the police for providing security and the IGP who pledged to champion who fight against violence against women and girls.
Uganda’s commitment to the rights of the Girl Child is further reflected in the Government’s ratification of global and regional conventions and declarations that prohibit discrimination and violence and promote the protection of girls. These include the UN Convention on the Rights of Child (CRC) and the UN Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW).

Yet, despite a favourable legal and policy environment, there are still significant challenges in realizing the rights of the Girl Child, in particular, the rights of Adolescent Girls.

According to UNICEF, approximately 35% of girls drop out of school because of early marriage and 23% do so because of early pregnancy (UNICEF, 2015). In Uganda, the teenage pregnancy rate is 24% with regional variations. This increases to 34% in the poorest households. In rural areas 24% of girls experience early pregnancy compared with 16% of wealthier households and 21% of urban girls (UNICEF, 2015). I have met these girls in Karamoja, Westnile, Mbarara, Mbale among other locations. They all called for human security and education.

In this context, the Role of MPs in ensuring that legal provisions are effectively implemented becomes crucial. MPs you are also a source of inspiration for girls across Uganda and key champions in the conversation with traditional leaders, elders and parents.
Ladies and Gentlemen,

As we have heard with the Situation of the Adolescent girl in Uganda, adolescent girls experience unique vulnerabilities that must be specifically programmed for.

Indeed, one of the main reasons adolescent girls are left behind is that they are not recognized as a distinct group and their experiences have not informed changes in services and programmes.

This must change!

**What needs to be done?**

Madam Guest of Honour, Members of Parliament, Ladies and Gentlemen, Girls and Boys,

We all have a role to play to ensure that Uganda and the world do not suffer from the lost potential of adolescent girls who are key to the creation of a productive workforce and healthy families.

Investing in adolescent girls’ education is one of the smartest ways to secure a better and more sustainable future for all.

It is one of the best ways in which we can all contribute to the realization of Uganda’s Vision 2040.
As we launch the work of the Parliamentary Champions on the Adolescent Girl, allow me to share a few areas of joint action:

1. **Educate adolescent girls** by improving their access to quality education and completion of schooling, and by focusing on their transition from primary to post-primary education and training;

2. **Keep adolescent girls healthy** by improving their access to, and utilization of, sexual and reproductive health services, including HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment services;

3. **Keep adolescent girls free from violence** by preventing and protecting girls from all forms of gender-based violence, abuse and exploitation, and ensuring that girls who experience violence receive prompt protection, services and access to justice;

4. **Promote adolescent engagement** by ensuring their access to leadership and other life skills as well as promoting their meaningful participation in decisions that affect their lives;

5. **Ensure adequate living standards for adolescent girls** by scaling up the provision of social protection services and promoting economic opportunities, particularly targeting out-of-school adolescent girls;
6. Talk to parents not to marry off their adolescents’ girls

7. Mentor an adolescent girl

Dear champions, please Count adolescent girls and make girls count by strengthening Uganda’s national capacity to collect, analyze, and use data on adolescent girls that can inform advocacy and programming for and with adolescent girls.

Your voice and role is key. By endorsing adolescent needs and concerns publicly, raising adolescent girls’ health, education and protection issues in Parliament and other public fora, and by encouraging positive discussion and debate on meeting the needs of adolescent girls, Members of Parliament are particularly critical to improve the well-being of Adolescent Girls.

I conclude by recognizing Uganda leadership in helping to create the SDGs and by demonstrating that local values are global values. By protecting and empowering adolescent girls, we are empowering Ugandan families and communities. This is the only way to achieve sustainable development and leave no one behind.

On behalf of the United Nations System in Uganda I would like to reiterate our commitment to work with all of you and with the Parliamentary Champions to support the acceleration of the rights of adolescent girls in Uganda.
I Thank You.