STATEMENT AT LAUNCH OF UN EMERGENCY APPEAL FOR RESPONSE TO COVID-19 AND ITS IMPACTS IN UGANDA

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The Minister for General Duties, Hon. Mary Okurut

Development Partners

UN Heads of Agencies and UN fellows

The Secretary-General of Uganda Red Cross, Mr. Robert Kwesiga

Representatives from Non-Governmental Organizations, Youth and Women’s groups, Private Sector, Academia

The Media

Ladies and Gentlemen

On behalf of the United Nations system in Uganda I am pleased to welcome you all to the Launch of the UN Emergency Appeal for response to COVID-19 and its Impacts in Uganda. Let me begin by expressing our solidarity with the Government and People of Uganda for all the early 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.
I am very pleased to welcome Honorable Okurut, the Minister of General Duties to this Launch and also thank all partners and colleagues who have joined us online. I commend all the health workers, essential personnel and UN staff at the frontlines helping to keep people alive. Your strong commitment and sacrifice is an inspiration.

We are in a very critical time in human history. We, the people of the world, are facing an unprecedented health threat with severe implications for society’s most vulnerable. While the COVID-19 pandemic is first and foremost a health crisis, its implications are far-reaching making it a human crisis. Essential services are strained as human and financial resources are diverted to respond to this rapidly expanding public health emergency.

COVID-19 puts all people in Uganda at risk and requires an urgent and robust response, including through the intensification of surveillance, detection and containment measures, as well as case management and community engagement. The necessary restrictions on movement are impacting both people’s ability to access basic services like healthcare and food and to sustain their livelihoods. These containment measures have significantly reduced the level of economic activity, particularly in the informal sector, which employs 85% of Ugandans. Up to 60 percent of informal enterprises have stopped their operations or moved below the poverty level, denying daily earnings to between 5 and 6 million informal workers, most of them living hand to mouth. The measures are particularly worrisome for the elderly, the disabled, as well as female and child-headed families. These populations often do not have access to banking services and do not have savings to fall back on. COVID-19 prevention measures will also backlog the criminal justice system as those awaiting bail or trial will face delays.
COVID-19 is a threat to the peaceful co-existence of refugees in Uganda. Funding for refugee responses across the region have dwindled and focus on national COVID-19 responses worldwide will likely hurt efforts to maintain what meagre resources remain to feed, clothe, shelter, educate and protect the 1.4 million refugees in Uganda. It is also important that changes in weather patterns and natural disasters that have forced Ugandans to flee their homes do not exacerbate the spread of the virus due to crowding in makeshift shelters. Investment in disaster management at local levels close to meteorological hot spots is key. The protection of children, particularly girls and young women, is compromised the longer they are out of school as they are exposed to the possibility of child marriage, exploitation and teen pregnancy. Families, communities, cultural and religious leaders are critical partners on this frontline against the exploitation of women and girls.

Unprecedented times call for unprecedented measures. The United Nations in partnership with the Government of Uganda, NGOs and Uganda Red Cross Society have developed the UN Emergency Appeal for the Response to and the Impacts of Covid-19 in Uganda. This collective efforts of 15 UN organizations and 20 national and international NGOs, including youth and women’s organizations brings forth international and local knowledge to respond to the most vulnerable in a complex environment. These life-saving efforts are only possible thanks to the Uganda’s experience in dealing with pandemics, humanitarian crises and ensuring safety and security for essential services.

The UN Emergency Appeal aims to support 12.8 million people by addressing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the most vulnerable people in Uganda, including the elderly, people living with disabilities, women and girls, refugees, widows, female-headed households, market women, street vendors, people living with HIV and TB, migrants and those displaced by natural disasters. The support will be provided through key areas: health; food security, livelihoods and
nutrition; life-saving services and social protection; refugees and displacement; immediate economic support and digital innovation; as well as coordination and common services. In all our interventions we will focus on the most vulnerable and ensuring that the rights of all people are protected, including children, persons with disabilities, and other vulnerable populations in accordance with national laws and shared universal principles. This means securing and building on progress in gender equality and women’s rights, including women into our response to support their efforts to advocate for women’s leadership in the COVID-19 response. We are inspired by the youth who are part of this Appeal, innovators in their own right, ready to contribute to the national effort through this platform. Placing people, protecting the environment and survival at the epicenter of our work means our we will focus on supporting the creation of community food banks, regional silos and a national food reserve. Coupled with support to sustain access to markets and bringing digital solutions to the value chain, this will contribute to protecting the women at the frontlines of food production and the small and medium enterprises.

We are aware that third National Development Plan (NDPIII) is being adjusted to the new realities as a result of COVID-19 and similarly the UN Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework (2021-2025) which is under formulation will also take into consideration the COVID-19 reality as we reprogramme our ongoing programmes. New approaches to domestic resource mobilization, repurposing the emerging manufacturing capacity in the country to meet basic needs, supporting digital solutions to protect the livelihoods of the most vulnerable are part of the immediate economic solutions we must work on together. New jobs on the digital realm, enhancing investments in social protection initiatives, increasing access to innovative solutions to access water and sanitation, are additional areas of work.

Each one of us has a role to play in this effort to stem its spread and no effort is too small to make a real difference. It is a shared burden. The only way to combat
COVID-19 is together. Today we stand here to present the UN Emergency Appeal and the organizations participating. We hope that you will contribute by increasing awareness of the work being done through this plan. We invite our partners to invest in this Appeal as it enables us to scale up our support to the Government and people of Uganda.

There are several options to contribute to the UN Emergency Appeal:

- Directly to organisations participating in this UN Emergency Appeal
-Towards the UN Uganda country based Multi-Partner Trust Fund Emergency Window managed out of UN Headquarters in New York

There are also global instruments launched by the UN Secretary-General to which donors contribute to:

- Solidarity Response Fund
- Humanitarian Appeal: To support the world’s most vulnerable countries UN launched a $2 billion coordinated global Humanitarian Response Plan to fight the impact of COVID in some of the world’s most vulnerable countries
- COVID-19 Response and Recovery Trust Fund, and
- UN Central Emergency Response Fund (CERF). We invite donors who wish to use this channel to please communicate to their capitals and UNHQ accordingly.

On behalf of the United Nations in Uganda, I conclude by conveying my thanks to Government for an open dialogue on the response to this challenge and for being ready to exploit the opportunities to strengthen Uganda’s capacities to care for the most vulnerable. We remain committed to leave no one behind and we call on everyone in Uganda to work together to address this crisis by following the guidelines of Ministry of Health and WHO.

This is the moment to come together to save lives and fight a common threat. I look forward to your support and collaboration.

Thank you!