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CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN
MINISTERS OF HEALTH CAHH/HIN/SP. 1 (IV)
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SPEECH BY HON. Z. X. R. KABIRU, MINISTER OF HEALTH OF UGANDA
AND CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF THE OAU HEALTH MINISTERS
AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FOURTH ORDINARY SESSION
OF THE CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF HEALTH

SPEECH BY HON. Z. K. R. KAHIRU, MINISTER OF HEALTH OF UGANDA

AT THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE FOURTH ORDINARY SESSION OF

HIS MAJESTY THE KING OF SWAZILAND,
THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE OAU,
THE DIRECTOR-GENERAL OF THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION,
THE REGIONAL DIRECTOR OF WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION FOR AFRICA,
HONOURABLE MINISTERS OF HEALTH,
YOUR EXCELLENCIES THE AMBASSADORS AND HIGH COMMISSIONERS,
DISTINGUISHED 'DELEGATES,
LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

I AM GREATLY HONOURED TO WELCOME YOU IN SWAZILAND TO THE FOURTH ORDINARY SESSION OF THE CONFERENCE OF AFRICAN MINISTERS OF HEALTH. WE ARE PARTICULARLY HONOURED BY THE PRESENCE OF YOUR MAJESTY, THE KING OF SWAZILAND. THIS INDICATES YOUR INTEREST IN THE HEALTH OF THE PEOPLE OF THIS CONTINENT. IN MAY 1989, WE HAD A SIMILAR CONFERENCE IN KAMPALA, UGANDA AND MADE A NUMBER OF RESOLUTIONS AIMED AT IMPROVING THE LEVEL OF HEALTH IN AFRICA. I WIS TO CONVEY TO YOU THE WARM AND FRATERNAL GREETINGS FROM H. E. YOWERI KAGUTA MUSEVENI, PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC OF UGANDA AND CURRENT CHAIRMAN OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY. HE WISHES THIS CONFERENCE SUCCESS IN ITS DELIBERATIONS ON HEALTH MATTERS AFFECTING THE MEMBER STATES OF THE ORGANIZATION OF AFRICAN UNITY. THE WORLD ECONOMIC CRISIS OF THE 1980'S CAUSED SERIOUS DIFFICULTIES IN MANY AFRICAN COUNTRIES. THE SUDDEN FALL IN THE PRICE OF COMMODITIES LIKE COFFEE, COCOA, COPPER, LED TO THE DRASTIC DECLINE IN INCOME AND INVESTMENTS.

DROUGHT FAMINE, EPIDEMICS OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES, THE PANDEMIC OF HIV INFECTION AND AIDS, MALNUTRITION, NATURAL AND MAN-MADE DISASTERS, CIVIL STRIFE, WARS, COMPLICATED BY DISPLACEMENT OF PERSONS, REFUGEES, UNDERMINED THE CAPACITY OF AFRICAN GOVERNMENTS TO MEET THE NEEDS OF THEIR POPULATIONS. THIS COUPLED WITH THE HEAVY DEBT BURDEN LEFT LITTLE MONEY TO BE SPENT ON HEALTH AND EDUCATION. SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL FACTORS THAT HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE CURRENT HEALTH CRISIS

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ARE, MAJOR ENVIRONMENTAL HAZARDS, RAPID POPULATION GROWTH, POVERTY, RECURRING HEALTH EMERGENCIES, HUMAN BEHAVIOURAL CHANGES AND ILLITERACY.

MANY CHILDREN CONTINUE TO DIE OF PREVENTABLE DISEASES LIKE MEASLES, TETANUS, TUBERCULOSIS, POLIOMYELITIS, WHOOPING COUGH, DIARRHOEAL DISEASES, ACUTE RESPIRATORY INFECTIONS, MALARIA AND MALNUTRITION ARE THE MAJOR CAUSES OF MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY PARTICULARLY IN CHILDREN. MANY PEOPLE IN AFRICA HAVE NO ACCESS TO SAFE DRINKING WATER, SANITARY MEANS OF EXCRETA DISPOSAL AND GOOD HOUSING. MANY NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICES IN AFRICA ARE IN A STATE OF DEEP CRISIS. THE HEALTH SITUATION IN AFRICA IS IN A CRISIS PRINCIPALLY BECAUSE OF THE WORSENING ECONOMIC SITUATION, AND THE LACK OF LOW COST COMMUNITY-BASED INTERVENTIONS. THIS IS A BIG CHALLENGE TO US AS MINISTERS OF HEALTH AND IT IS OUR RESPONSIBILITY TO PLAN TOGETHER, URGENT STRATEGIES AND MECHANISMS TO CONTROL AND STOP THE CRISIS SO THAT WE ESTABLISH HEALTH AS A FOUNDATION FOR DEVELOPMENT OF AFRICA.

THE LITTLE RESOURCES AVAILABLE ARE BEING SWALLOWED UP BY THE HIGH COST OF CURATIVE SERVICES MAINLY LOCATED IN URBAN AREAS, LEAVING THE BULK OF THE POPULATION STAYING IN THE RURAL AREAS WITHOUT HEALTH CARE. LITTLE FUNDS ARE MADE AVAILABLE FOR PROMOTIVE AND PREVENTIVE HEALTH SERVICES. YET MILLIONS OF AFRICANS DIE ANNUALLY FROM PREVENTABLE INFECTIOUS DISEASES. WOMEN AND

CHILDREN, BECAUSE OF THEIR SPECIAL BIOLOGICAL NATURE, ARE PARTICULARLY SUSCEPTIBLE TO ADVERSE CIRCUMSTANCES. WE NEED TO PROTECT THIS GROUP. WE MUST NOT PAY LIP SERVICE TO CHILD SURVIVAL, PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT, AS YOU ARE AWARE A WORLD SUMMIT FOR THE HEADS OF STATE AND GOVERNMENT WAS HELD IN NEW YORK IN SEPTEMBER 1990, TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEMS OF CHILD SURVIVAL, PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT. THE WORLD LEADERS MADE A DECLARATION CONCERNING CHILD SURVIVAL, PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT. I BELIEVE THAT YOU HAVE ALREADY RECEIVED THE FULL TEXT OF THE DECLARATION. I ALSO WISH TO DRAW YOUR ATTENTION TO THE FACT THAT IN MAY 1989, WE, THE OAU HEALTH MINISTERS, DECIDED TO DECLARE THE 1990 "AFRICAN DECADE FOR CHILD SURVIVAL, PROTECTION AND DEVELOPMENT". I APPEAL TO YOU MY COLLEAGUES TO COMMIT YOURSELVES AND IMPLEMENT OUR RESOLUTIONS. IMMUNISATION AGAINST THE SIX KILLER DISEASES MUST BE PURSUED MORE VIGOROUSLY AND MEASURES MUST BE TAKEN TO ENSURE SUSTAINABILITY OF THESE PROGRAMMES.

IN 1985, THE WHO REGIONAL COMMITTEE FOR AFRICA DECIDED TO STRENGTHEN NATIONAL HEALTH SYSTEMS USING PRIMARY HEALTH CARE. APPROACH. IT WAS AGREED TO SUSTAIN COMMUNITY-BASED HEALTH AND RELATED ACTIVITIES - THE FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT - BY APPROPRIATE OPERATIONAL, TECHNICAL AND STRATEGIC SUPPORT AT ALL LEVELS. WE MUST REVIEW OUR HEALTH POLICIES, CHOOSE OUR PRIORITIES WELL AND USE COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIES. THE COMMUNITY MUST PARTICIPATE IN THE IDENTIFICATION OF THEIR HEALTH PROBLEMS IN THEIR AREA, IN THE PLANNING, IMPLEMENTATION, MANAGEMENT, MONITORING AND EVALUATION OF THEIR HEALTH SERVICES. IT IS VERY IMPORTANT TO INTEGRATE HEALTH PROGRAMMES AT THE LOCAL LEVEL AND PUT EMPHASIS ON THE TRAINING OF HEALTH WORKERS AND MANAGEMENT OF HEALTH SERVICES AND RESOURCES.

I WISH TO DRAW YOUR ATTENTION TO THE THREAT OF HIV INFECTION AND AIDS IN AFRICA. AIDS IS NOW A MAJOR CAUSE OF MORBIDITY AND MORTALITY IN SEVERAL

AFRICAN COUNTRIES. A CUMULATIVE TOTAL NUMBER OF 83,010 AIDS CASES HAVE BEEN

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REPORTED BY FIFTY-THREE COUNTRIES WITHIN AFRICA. THE TOTAL NUMBER OF ESTIMATED HIV INFECTED CASES IN AFRICA IS MORE THAN 5.5 MILLION AND THOSE WITH AIDS IS ESTIMATED TO BE 700,000. THE AIDS PANDEMIC IS NOW RECOGNIZED AS A GLOBAL PUBLIC HEALTH ISSUE OF GREAT CONCERN. THE NUMBER OF CASES REPORTED IS ON THE SHARP INCREASE. AIDS IS A DISEASE WITH SERIOUS ECONOMIC, HEALTH AND DEMOGRAPHIC CONSEQUENCES. FOR. EXAMPLE, IT POSES THE PROBLEM OF ORPHANS. AS THERE IS: NO CURE AS YET, THE ONLY WEAPON AGAINST THIS KILLER DISEASE IS HEALTH EDUCATION FOR BEHAVIOURAL CHANGE. THERE MUST BE FUNDAMENTAL BEHAVIOUR CHANGE ESPECIALLY IN THE GENERATION NOT YET EMBARKED ON A SEXUAL AND CHILD BEARING ACTIVITY (6 - 15 YEARS). INDIVIDUALS MUST PROTECT THEMSELVES AGAINST AIDS BY PRACTISING SAFE SEX. THE CONTROL OF AIDS REQUIRES COLLECTIVE EFFORTS INDIVIDUALLY, NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY. WE MUST HAVE POLITICAL WILL AND BE OPEN IN OUR COUNTRIES ABOUT THIS DISEASE. THE CONTROL OF AIDS REQUIRES A MULTI-SECTORAL APPROACH WITH GOOD COORDINATION OF ALL CONTROL ACTIVITIES INCLUDING SAFE BLOOD TRANSFUSION, TRAINING OF HEALTH WORKERS, EARLY TREATMENT OF SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES, RESEARCH, COUNSELLING, PATIENT CARE. LET US PULL TOGETHER AND FIGHT AIDS. OAU IS A GOOD FORUM TO DO SO.

A NUMBER OF RECURRING EPIDEMICS OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES LIKE MALARIA, CHOLERA, YELLOW FEVER, PLAGUE, TUBERCULOSIS, ARE THREATENING MANY LIVES ON OUR CONTINENT. THE NEED TO STRENGTHEN EPIDEMIOLOGICAL SURVEILLANCE, INFORMATION SYSTEMS, AVAILABILITY OF ESSENTIAL DRUGS AND TAKING SERIOUS MEASURES TO BE PREPARED TO RESPOND TO SUCH EMERGENCIES IS VERY VITAL. LET US FULFIL THE GUIDELINES FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS AND RESPONSE WHICH WAS APPROVED BY THE OAU COUNCIL OF MINISTERS. WE SHOULD USE SIMPLE COMMUNITY-BASED STRATEGIES IN THE CONTROL OF MALARIA AND OTHER DISEASES.

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COLLEAGUES, WE NEED TO FIND MEANS OF FINANCING HEALTH PROGRAMMES OTHER THAN FROM OUR MEAGRE GOVERNMENT CONTRIBUTIONS, OR DONORS. WE NEED TO SUPPORT THE SPECIAL HEALTH FUND FOR AFRICA. THE BAMAKO INITIATIVE NEEDS TO BE REVIEWED AND STRENGTHENED. I FEEL THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO FIND A SOLUTION TO OUR HEALTH FINANCING PROBLEMS IF WE WORK ON IT TOGETHER USING THE OAU.

YOUR MAJESTY THE KING OF SWAZILAND,

I WISH TO THANK YOU, ON BEHALF OF MY DELEGATION AND ON BEHALF OF OTHER DELEGATIONS HERE AS WELL AS ON MY OWN BEHALF, FOR THE WARM RECEPTION AND HOSPITALITY THAT WAS BEEN ACCORDED TO US SINCE OUR ARRIVAL IN YOUR BEAUTIFUL AND FRIENDLY KINGDOM. WE HAVE BEEN VERY MUCH IMPRESSED BY THE BEAUTY OF YOUR COUNTRY AS WELL AS BY CHEERING HAPPY AND FRIENDLY PEOPLE OF SWAZILAND. I CONGRATULATE YOU YOUR MAJESTY THE KING, YOUR GOVERNMENT AND THE PEOPLE OF THE KINGDOM OF SWAZILAND FOR HOSTING THIS CONFERENCE. I THANK THE WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION, UNICEF, WORLD BANK AND OTHER INTERNATIONAL AND NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS, FOR SUPPORT THEY ARE GIVING TO IMPROVE THE HEALTH OF AFRICANS. . I THANK OUR EXPERTS, WHO HAVE PREPARED REPORTS FOR US TO CONSIDER. I THANK ALL THOSE PEOPLE WHO HAVE, IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER, CONTRIBUTED TO THE SUCCESS OF THIS CONFERENCE. I WISH YOU ALL GOOD DELIBERATIONS.